

SYNERGY MAGAZINE



VOLUME 1: NO. 2

EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF CINEMA & LITERATURE

PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE

OUR BIGGEST
ISSUE YET !!

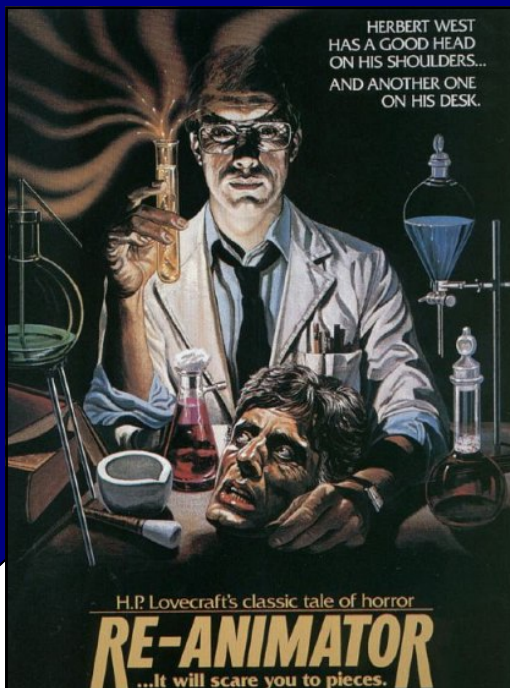
Cult Cinema

SYNERGY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 2: NO.2

EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF CINEMA AND LITERATURE

Cult cinema



Publication Schedule

Online—Daily Updates

Print and Digital Editions

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Plus special editions

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Address

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Australia

Editor

Robert Black

EDITORIAL COMPETITIONS NEWS IN BRIEF

Peter Jackson Profile & Forgotten Silver
Baadasss Cinema: Blaxploitation Cinema
Not Quite Hollywood: Ozploitation
Snuff You ! Snuff & Shockumentary Cinema
The Dark Justice of Jigsaw: The Saw Films

**BOOK REVIEWS
DVD REVIEWS
BLAXPLOITATION
RETRO CULT REVIEWS
CULT EROTICA
CULT HORROR
THINKING TIME
WORLD CINEMA
MAGAZINES IN REVIEW**

The Cult of Countdown

**MUSIC IN REVIEW
ART & ARTISTS IN REVIEW
COMICS AND GRAPHIC ART**



REVIEW TEAM

Robert Black, Bob Estreich, Jeremy & Renata Kong, Michelle Taylor and various freelance reviewers.

Special Thanks again to Bob Estreich for his ongoing support and excellent articles and reviews.

EDITORIAL

Welcome to another issue of Synergy.

We hope you enjoyed our World Cinema issue, we thought it was pretty neat as it not only included mainstream World Cinema but lots of strange and weird World Cinema as well, exactly what you should have by now come to expect from us !

This issue is a special Cult Cinema edition and we feel sure you will feel right at home. It includes lots of great features from a special profile of Peter Jackson to Not Quite Hollywood (revised with a focus on the DVD release), a feature on Creature Features films and more.

Special reviews departments are aplenty covering all aspects of Cult Cinema including Ozploitation, Blaxploitation, Cult Erotica and Cult Horror and a rather nice focus on collectibles.

There are some cool giveaways including Shaun of the Dead items from Sideshow Collectibles and some great DVD and Blu Ray titles.

Throughout each year we hope to have various special editions. While these will continue to have our standard diverse range of DVD, book, magazine and comic reviews, they will also include special features and focused review sections.

This means that regardless of your interest, there will always be something to grab your attention in Synergy.

A word on content—obviously when reviewing cult films there will be mature and adult content. While we will not include images which are pornographic, some of the titles we review will include explicit content and explicit descriptions.

It will, occasionally, include images of nudity



and certainly will regularly offend good taste. We pride ourselves on intelligent reviews which are well expressed but at the same time are more than comfortable using more expressive language as needed.

Our approach to films is to explore them in detail, covering how they are made, production values, plot, character development, concepts and ideas. Sure, we welcome films that are just plain fun as well, but we do try to find titles which offer that little bit more. You will not find reviews in Synergy which count tit shots or offer death counters. Synergy takes an intelligent view of alternative cinema. Please be aware of this.

In regards to advertising we have had a small change of policy. While we do not accept paid advertising we have decided to occasionally run exchange advertising and promotional advertising for things you will find of interest. Adverts will always only be a very small percentage of content and certainly will never influence the objectivity of our reviews !

You will also notice different reviewers in Synergy of late, we are pleased to have a range of new permanent reviewers including Bob Estreich and Jeremy and Renata Kong. It is always nice to have different views and opinions on cinema and they each bring their own unique skills to the table. I certainly appreciate having them on board.

In this issue Bob Estreich once again offers us some superb articles including a comprehensive profile of Peter Jackson. His articles are always worth looking out for !

Robert Black
Editor



INFORMATION



Synergy Reviews DVDs from all regions.
The R description with each title advises the Region.

1 = USA
2 = UK
3 = Asia
4 = Australia
0 = All region.

NTSC or PAL is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

Blu Ray: We only review All Region and Region B titles.

The best reference site for Blu Ray is blu-ray.com, it includes of lots details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on Blu Ray region information.

Web: <http://www.blu-ray.com>

While we review the DVD that has been supplied to us (from whatever region), there may be other editions of the film. Since we are a genre based magazine, the range of titles reviewed will always come from all around the globe.

For international films from the US there are many suppliers including www.amazon.com.

For international films from the UK there are many suppliers including www.amazon.co.uk.

For rare Asian titles we recommend Asian Cult DVD (<http://asiancult.com>)

For other rare titles we recommend Diabolik DVD (<http://www.diabolikdvd.com>).

There are a wide variety of retail outlets in Australia—a good place for price comparisons is DVD Plaza. (<http://www.dvdplaza.com.au>)

We have no business relationship with any retailer and only recommend them for your information. Please make an informed decision before purchasing from any store and compare prices.

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The print edition Synergy Magazine is published 4-6 times a year and includes reviews from the website from the preceding months with special features, extra content, extended reviews, added images, screen shorts and competitions.

Digital Edition Special Conditions

The Digital Edition can be downloaded free. It can be printed for personal use only.

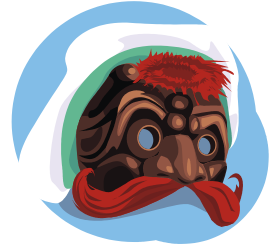
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The Digital Edition cannot be altered or articles used without permission, except for small segments for criticism or review as copyright allows.

The only exception to this is with reviews supplied by Synergy to distributors and/or producers.

The copyright for the majority of images used (screenshots, artwork, cover images etc) is the property of the individual publishers. They should not be reproduced without permission. The movie posters used are within the public domain.

COMPETITIONS



In Bruges Giveaway !

Colin Farrell and Academy Award nominee Ralph Fiennes star in this edgy, action packed comedy, filled with thrilling chases, spectacular shoot-outs and an explosive ending you won't want to miss!

Hit men Ray (Colin Farrell) and Ken (Brendan Gleeson) have been ordered to cool their heels in the storybook city of Bruges (it's in Belgium) after finishing a big job. But since hit men make the worst tourists, they soon find themselves in a life and death struggle of comic proportions against one very angry crime boss (Ralph Fiennes)!



Thanks to Icon we have 5 DVDs and 2 Blu Rays to giveaway.

Send an email with **In Bruges** in the heading to: promotions@synergy-magazine.com

In the body of the message include your name, address and whether you would like to win the Blu Ray or DVD edition.



Sideshow Collectibles: Shaun of the Dead

Sideshow Collectibles produces a range of high quality collectibles. Since this is a special cult

film issue they have offered us a couple of unique items to giveaway. These are 12" figures based on the **Shaun of the Dead** cult film.

Shaun of the Dead was and is one of the most successful zombie comedy horror films to date and these figures are suitably superb with lots of nice extras.

Shaun

Shaun's combination of lofty aspirations and utter lack of drive have lead to a rather serious dissatisfaction with his rather unexciting life. His girlfriend is unhappy with their relationship, and his stepfather's taunting keeps him away from his mother, leaving Shaun with only his lazy best friend Ed. While Ed is content to watch TV and drink at the local pub, Shaun wishes for a more eventful life.

After Shaun has a terribly unsuccessful day, topped off by getting dumped, Shaun and Ed drown their sorrows at The Winchester pub. Despite Ed's advice to move on and forget Liz, Shaun drunkenly realizes that his miserable and mundane routine will never make him happy.

Shaun vows to get Liz back, reconcile with his parents, and make something of his life. Meanwhile, a zombie plague threatens to overtake



London and ruin Shaun's plans and Ed's busy schedule (playing video games). Shaun and Ed must round up Shaun's friends and family, and make the difficult journey back to the pub to fight off the undead from the bunker of The Winchester, and perhaps win back Liz's love in the process.

Shaun is an authentic likeness of Simon Pegg as Shaun.

It is a Fully articulated male body with 30+ points of articulation and also includes a shirt, tie, pants, socks, shoes, belt, Shaun's nametag, two vinyl records with sleeves, cricket bat, pool Cue and 2 sets of interchangeable hands.

It is a 12-Inch Figure Display Base with 'Shaun of the Dead' logo.

Send an email with **Shaun** in the heading to: promotions@synergy-magazine.com

Ed

Ed has been Shaun's best friend since childhood. Content to play video games and crash on Shaun's couch, Ed's sloth is usually rubbing off on the malleable and dissatisfied Shaun.

But while neither friend is the most driven fellow, the two friends are forever linked and loyal to one another. When Shaun's life takes a downward turn, Ed does all he can to push Shaun to lighten up and have a little fun.

After Shaun has a terribly unsuccessful day, complete with being dumped by his girlfriend Liz, Ed and Shaun drown their sorrows at The Winchester pub. Despite Ed's advice to move on and forget Liz, Shaun drunkenly realizes that his miserable and mundane routine will never make him happy.



Meanwhile, a zombie plague threatens to overtake London and ruin Shaun's plans and Ed's busy schedule of playing video games.

In order to save their futures, Shaun and Ed round up Shaun's friends and family, and they make the epic journey back to the pub to fight off the undead from the bunker of The Winchester.

Ed is an authentic likeness of Nick Frost as Ed.

He has fully articulated male body with 30+ points of articulation as well as a 'Got Wood' T-shirt, shorts, socks, shoes, cigarettes, two Vinyl records with sleeves, pool cue, shovel, cell phone and 2 sets of interchangeable hands. Ed is 12-Inch Figure Display Base with 'Shaun of the Dead' logo.



Send an email with **Ed** in the heading to: promotions@synergy-magazine.com

Winners will be drawn at random on April 30th and notified by email.

Special Thanks to **Sideshow Collectibles** for supplying these giveaways.

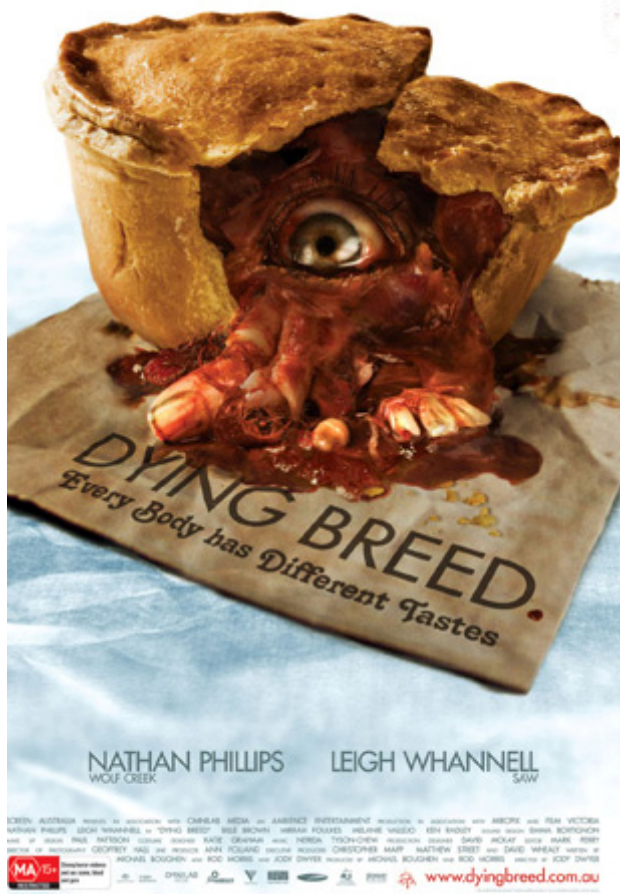
It is well worth looking through their website they have an incredible range of figures from all sorts of genres, from horror to science fiction, classics to, of course, some amazing Star Wars figures and collectibles. Their site also includes podcasts and lots of information on their product range, if you get on their newsletter mailing list there are cool competitions as well.

Sideshow Collectibles

Web: <http://www.sideshowtoy.com>

Dying Breed

Giveaway!



This issue we have covered lots of strange Aussie cinema. Ozploitation has become the flavour of the day since the explosive success of **Not Quite Hollywood**. However, most Ozploitation films date from the Seventies and Eighties and while there has been some recent Aussie horror success stories, **Saw** and **Wolf Creek** comes to mind, it is with **Dying Breed** that Ozploitation comes full swing and hits us in the face.

As discussed in our review, **Dying Breed** brings

together so many traditional exploitation themes from cannibalism to inbreeding, human meat pies to mantraps, a perverse twist on Australian history to supposedly extinct Tasmanian Tigers.

This is a highly sophisticated Ozploitation film which uses uniquely Australian themes such as Alexander Peirce and his penal experience and the Tasmanian Tiger as a backdrop to explore all manner of cult and horror themes.

Sony has made available 10 DVDS and 10 SIGNED posters as a giveaway.

I predict this film will become a major success and become a respected cult classic in the canon of Aussie film, so the posters alone are unique collectibles.

Send an email to:
promotions@synergy-magazine.com
 with "**Dying Breed**" in the subject line.

Make sure you include your full name, address and email address.

Australia Only entries please and one per home address.

Multiple entries will be discarded.

The giveaway will be drawn on 1st May, 2009



NEWS IN BRIEF



About the Cult Special Issue of Synergy

For this Cult Special Edition some reviews which are significant within the cult genre have been included in an expanded form from earlier issues.

Since this is a special Cult issue we thought it would be nice to bring a lot of our reviews together in one special issue. Hence it is bigger than our previous releases and packed with lots of weirdness.

At the same, we are still committed to having a majority of new content every issue.

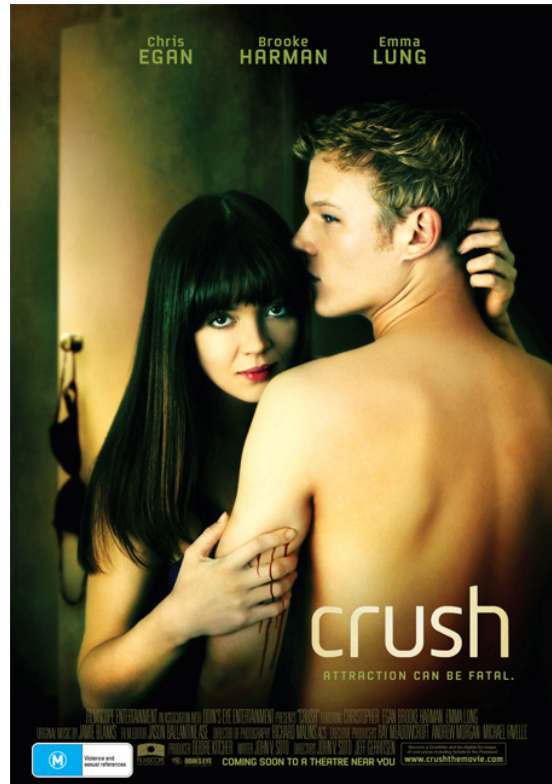
crush

Crush, a supernatural thriller created and written by John Soto and co-directed by John Soto and Jeff Gerritsen with Deidre Kitcher as Producer, has been picked up for national theatrical release by co-distributors' Filmscope Entertainment and Odin's Eye Entertainment in the first half of 2009.

Crush stars Chris Egan (NBC series **Kings**: 2009, **Eragon**, **Resident Evil 3 - Extinction**, **Virgin Territory**), Emma Lung (**The Jammed**, **Triangle**, **The Boys are Back**, **House of Wax**, **Entourage: 2008**) and Brooke Harman (**Till Human Voices Wake Us**, **The Secret Life of Us**, **Ned Kelly**).

Soto and Gerritsen have created a must-see film for teens and young adults, a suspenseful thriller which flirts with the supernatural.

Crush follows the story of University student Julian (Chris Egan) who after being seduced by the mysterious and beautiful Anna (Emma Lung), finds his life unravelling in a series of increasingly strange and dangerous events as her infatuation with him turns deadly.



Crush could be best described as a teen **Fatal Attraction** meets **The Haunting**. Combine this with the lure of former 'Home and Away' star, Chris Egan whose major television series, **Kings** for US network **NBC**, is set to be as big as **Heroes** (replacing **ER** from 15 March 2009) and AFI award nominee Emma Lung and you'll start to understand why **Crush** is one of the most anticipated teen films this season.

The **Crush** trailer has already become a favourite attraction on You Tube where it recently ranked in the Top 5 in the WORLD (out of 17,200 clips) for all countries under the You Tube search 'Movie Trailers 2009 Official'.

The **Crush** trailer has had over 100,000 views in three weeks and has won the following awards; No.1 Rated Movie Trailer - Films and Animation, January 2009, Australia. No.1 Viewed Movie Trailer - Films and Animation, January 2009, Australia. No.2 Favourite Movie Trailer - Films and Animation, January 2009, Australia

**Sinema Saliba
proudly presents:
Matthew Saliba's
Frankenstein
Unlimited**

A Frankenthology of
Quebec Short Films
including:



"Flesh for Kung Fu" by King-Wei Chu

"Victor" by Matthew Forbes

"Mr. Fluffenstein" by Martin Gauthier

"Occam's Razor" by Peter James

"Reflection" by Maude Michaud

"Dark Lotus" by Matthew Saliba

Matthew Saliba's **Frankenstein Unlimited** is a feature-length anthology film composed of six independently produced shorts by some of the rising stars of Quebec Indy Cinema, all using the themes of the original Frankenstein novel (and films) as inspiration.

Launched by Montreal filmmaker Matthew Saliba in the Fall of 2007, Frankenstein Unlimited was conceived with the following ideas in mind:

1. Creating a collaborative of very talented filmmakers who would pool together their resources to make a truly independent feature-length film WITHOUT the financial assistance of Government grants.
2. Challenging the status-quo of Quebec "D.I.Y." cinema by proving to the world that there's more than just zombies, gore and bad comedy going on in La Belle Province.
3. Creating dynamic, innovative and mind-blowing shorts that take the themes and mythos of Mary Shelley's creation in bold new directions including a poetic epilogue to the original novel, an absurd comedy about a robotic cat, a surreal drama channelling the spirit of David Lynch and David Cronenberg, a kung-fu epic starring the one and only Gordon Liu, an intense psychological cat-and-mouse game and a sado-surreal film noir "photomontage" shot in sumptuous black-and-white and tinted blue to create a 1920s silent film aesthetic.

It's been over one year since FU was initially launched, and we're very happy to report, the

filmmakers involved have delivered on all three points and we're close to unleashing our monster upon audiences around the world!

<http://www.myspace.com/frankensteinunlimited>

Beyond Entertainment Releases Pure Shit.

Finally, after more than 30 years lost in the wilderness, Bert Deling's 70s masterpiece, **Pure Shit**, is released for the first time on DVD.

In 1976 the Australian underground spewed out the most controversial film ever made about the heroin subculture. Four junkies desperate to score in a world with too many rules and death lurking only a cubicle away. **Pure Shit** speaks truths never mentioned in polite society. Its tools are speed, rock 'n' roll, humour and kaleidoscopic colour.

Originally the Commonwealth censor deemed **Pure Shit** unclassifiable. The Australian public was denied access to one of the funniest, most beautifully written, and masterfully performed portrayals of drug addiction ever committed to celluloid.

The groundswell of love and support for **Pure Shit** has been incredible and comes from a diverse group that includes the likes of Warren Ellis (musician), David Stratton (author and film critic), Bob Ellis (filmmaker & critic) and John Flaus (critic and actor).

Pure Shit carries with it an aura of mystique and legend. Made for less than \$20k through funds secured from a drug and alcohol agency and dubious "other sources", it is a film that some believe SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN but MOST CERTAINLY WAS! And now, thanks to the painstaking work of the National Film and Sound Archive and the commitment of Beyond Home Entertainment, WILL FOREVER BE!

DVD Features

16 page booklet, OZ Rock Soundtrack CD, Director & Actors Commentary, Interviews: cast crew & celebrity guests, 'Pure Shit Reunion' 'Rollin' with Bert and Gaz' and a Stills gallery.

Pure Shit on the Web:

<http://www.beyondhomeentertainment.com.au/pureshit/>

Knowing Darkness: Artists Inspired by Stephen King

Centipede Press is pleased to announce the forthcoming publication of *Knowing Darkness: Artists Inspired by Stephen King*, with an original introduction by film director Frank Darabont.

KEY SPECIFICATIONS:

full color
11 x 15 inches
448 pages
over 500 illustrations
over 30 pages of double-page foldouts
publication date: November 2009

In addition to the wealth of previously published artwork, new works of art have been commissioned especially for this book: Michael Whelan leads the way with a magnificent front cover, and a new interior piece illustrating *The Dark Tower*. The newly commissioned interior pieces include art illustrating "One for the Road" (Stephen Gervais), *It* (Bob Eggleton), *The Shining* (Douglas Smith), *'Salem's Lot* (John Picacio), *Hearts in Atlantis* (Les Edwards), *Duma Key* (Don Maitz), "The Lawnmower Man" (Jason Eckhardt), *The Tommyknockers* (Alex McVey), *Black House and Cell* (Zach McCain), "Weeds" and *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* (David Ho), and others.

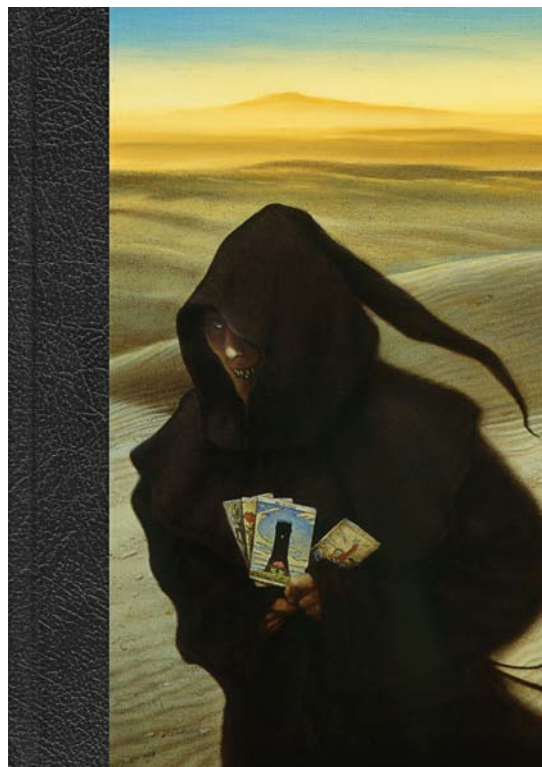
Shot from the originals or the artist's original color-corrected computer scans, free of distracting type or design, the artwork in this book is printed on heavy matte paper and varnished for protection. Every artistic medium is represented: scratchboard, oils, watercolors, pencils, collage, photographs, and digital art.

The text, written by King critic George Beahm, looks back at 34 years of King in print. It provides a detailed look at the writer and his life, supplemented with interviews with Michael Whelan, Bernie Wrightson, Drew Struzan, John Cayea, Dave Christiansen, and many others.

To be published in three collectible editions, all share the same text, art, and design.

SLIP CASED EDITION

2500 copies (not numbered or signed)
bound with an imported fabric with printed silk panels
cloth slipcase printed in four colors



TRAY CASED EDITION

400 copies (numbered; signed by over 30 artists)
bound with an imported fabric with printed silk panels
four color suede traycase with print holder
15 prints, each measuring 13 x 19 inches, printed on 300gsm stock
a separate book with 20 oversize 13 x 19 prints with artwork from the book.

TRAY CASED EDITION WITH ORIGINAL MICHAEL WHELAN REMARQUE

Michael Whelan has agreed to create 50 custom remarks for the traycased edition. These remarks will be high quality, original drawings, done in charcoal pencil, pen and ink, brush and ink, or black acrylic, or another medium. The pictures shown below show a sampling of the different kinds of artwork that Mr Whelan may do for the book. The artwork can be inscribed if you like.



Centipede Press

Web: <http://www.centipedeypress.com>

DownloadHorror.com

**HORROR FILMS FROM DISTRIBUTORS
THE WORLD OVER CONVERGE AT
ONE DOWNLOAD STORE
"DOWNLOADHORROR.COM"**

From Mainstream to Small, Independent Edgy Films; Available For \$9.99 US Each, Beginning Friday the 13th (March)

Horror fans, take note. It's time to stop searching the web for just the right horror film. Whether you want a popular mainstream flick, or a small, independent cult favorite, the one place to shop beginning this coming Friday the 13th is DownloadHorror.com. The announcement was made today by Darrin Ramage, Director of Acquisitions, Maxim Media International; whom is the exclusive content provider for DownloadHorror.com.

"Let's face it: there is no other film genre in the world more popular than horror, with the most discerning fan base—knowing what they want, and wanting to get it when they want it," said Ramage. "With DownloadHorror.com, these diehards will be hard pressed to come up empty when searching for just the right film to meet their needs, any time, day or night. Our intention is to make DownloadHorror.com the only place to go for any and all horror film needs."

DownloadHorror.com features a full array of horror films, all downloadable for only \$9.99 US each, with no membership required. Specific horror categories include Erotic, Hauntings, Horror Comedy, Monsters, Occult, Revenge, Slashers, Vampires, Werewolves, and Zombie. Every week, new films will be available, from a variety of studios and independent filmmakers across the globe.

All films on DownloadHorror.com are high resolution DVD Quality, 100 percent DRM-Free, MP4 downloads that will play on nearly any computer or portable digital video player.

DownloadHorror will launch this Friday, March 13th at 12:01 AM EST. Head over and be one of the first to check out horror's new home on the net.

At present this is only available in North America but will be extended worldwide later in the year.

Some classic films available from Download Horror include:

"Official Selection - H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival." While shooting a Halloween news story on horror writer H.P. Lovecraft, reporter Rebecca Marsh discovers that the "fiction" Lovecraft wrote is actually true and the creatures and cults described in his writings really exist. She and her crew are marked for death because of the knowledge they now possess. Engaging the help of an occult expert and a sexy witch, Rebecca and the TV news team are forced to fight the evil forces that have come.

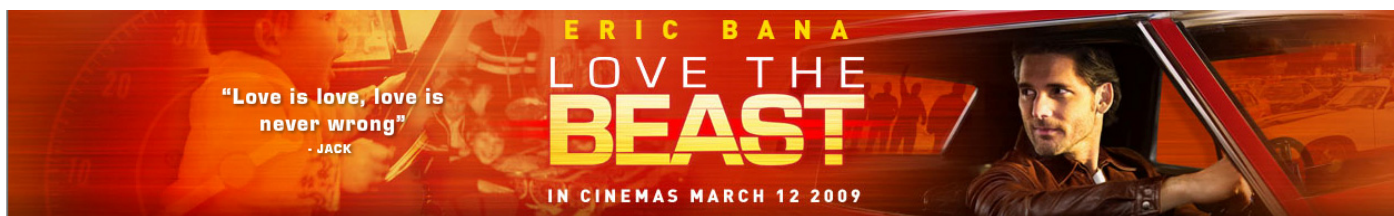


In "The Witch's Sabbath" a coven of witches mask their true identity by operating the "Sin and Skin" strip club. To keep the coven as one, they must behead 666 victims before the arrival of their Dark Lord on Halloween. Unsuspecting victims are carefully chosen at the strip club and find themselves invited to feast at a sinister mansion where the ladies of "Sin and Skin" offer their victims one final meal. With their deadline fast approaching, the head witch Auriana (Syn DeVil), makes a desperate attempt to meet their Lord's demands. They soon realize that the attendees of their final dinner on All Hallows Eve prove to be more than just victims.



In 1998, serial killer William Allen Grone was convicted of 13 felony counts including rape, torture and murder. During a subsequent search of his residence, investigators discovered evidence linking him to the disappearance of several people dating back to March of 1995. The evidence gathered included Grone's journal and a canister containing two-and-a-half minutes of Super 8 film. In his journal, Grone refers to the Super 8 footage as "The Great American Snuff Film".





"...an unexpected pleasure... (Bana provides) an intimate insight into his life before Hollywood... whether you're a revhead or not this is a terrific film full of laughs, drama and suspense as the very likeable Bana pushes his 1970s muscle car to its limits)"

Jo Chichester, Vogue

"I know a good movie when I see one, and Love the Beast is a ripper... Bana has done himself, Ford and all car lovers proud with this funny, fascinating and insightful tale, which is also his directing debut... Don't for a moment think that Love the Beast is just for petrol-heads. It's such lovable, knockabout fun that everyone, like me, will come away with an appreciation of Bana and his often maddening bond with his car."

Shannon Harvey, Sunday Times

Australian film is looking to have a strong year ahead guided by the release of Eric Bana's **Love the Beast**, which has achieved the best opening weekend box office results for an Australian feature documentary since Bra Boys opened in 2007.

Distributed by **Madman Entertainment**, Love the Beast currently stands at #11 at the Australian box office with a total of \$332,401 since opening nationally on 12 March, and the film is looking to continue this strong run through its second week at the cinema.

Madman MD Paul Wiegard enthused, "it's been a dynamic and ultimately fruitful collaboration between Eric, the producers and the team at Madman,

and we've all put our hearts, minds and resources into the release of Love the Beast. True to his word - and indeed the film - the filmmaker's been on the road presenting his film to audiences."

In addition to the modern multiplexes, thousands of enthusiastic Beast-owners turned out in style at two of Australia's drive-in cinemas - Village Drive-In Coburg and Greater Union Blacktown Drive-in - last week, with both locations achieving some of the highest box-office results for the film.

"Eric's film has won over Aussie audiences, most particularly in suburbs, regions & multiplexes where until now, local films have feared to tread. It's also hugely rewarding to see the film playing so well in that great Aussie icon, the Drive-in, in many ways the natural home for Eric's Beast!" said Madman's Theatrical Distribution Manager, James Hewison.

The film's Producer Peter Hill said, "It is very encouraging to see the box office reflect the incredible audience feedback we have been getting. The positive word of mouth and great reviews the film has been receiving in Australia has just been fantastic."

Following the Australian release, **Love the Beast** has been selected to play at the prestigious Tribeca Film Festival in New York, on 29 April 2009. The gala event will mark the Australian feature film's International Premiere and will be the launch pad for the film overseas.

Eric Bana and Dr.Phil in Love the Beast



Peter Jackson in Profile

By his most obsessive fan - Bob Estreich

Peter Jackson is that rarity among film makers – an independent who has made it to the top. It was not an easy trip, but he not only made it, he did so in staid, conservative New Zealand. For decades their film industry was stuck in a rut. Film production was mostly confined to travelogues and the occasional overseas film made in NZ for the scenery and cheap production costs. It was a given that no one would watch a NZ film unless it had a big-name overseas star. The cultural cringe also affected the actors themselves. There was a feeling (mostly correct) that to succeed meant you had to go overseas. In spite of this, there was a nucleus of talent which preferred to stay local. All-rounders like Ian Mune formed the basis for a developing local industry.

Jackson grew up when “God Save The Queen” was played at the start of each cinema showing. His family’s post-war transition from Britain to NZ would have been painless, for NZ’s culture was essentially British, as was their television content. As a kid in the sixties and seventies, Jackson was a fan of early fantasy shows like **Thunderbirds** (a British puppet SF series) and Ray Harryhausen’s fantasy films. He was also influenced by the lunacy of the **Monty Python** shows on TV. The quirky British sense of humour shows in a lot of his work. As an only child he spent a lot of time amusing himself, and it may be this that spiked his early interest in horror. *“Being an only child does make you more imaginative,because you have to create your own games by yourself.....you’re creating it in your own head.”*

This was to show out in his work – he already had in his mind exactly how a scene should play. He got his first movie camera when he was eight or nine and he experimented with stop motion animation, time lapse and as many of the other professional techniques as his limited resources allowed. His few friends of the time remember him as becoming increasingly reclusive – not so much antisocial as just more interested in his current film project. Yet he would come



out of his shell to discuss film with like-minded people. At college he met Ken Hammon, another film buff student. Together they explored the world of cinema, culminating with a rented copy of **Texas Chainsaw Massacre**. It made a strong impression on Jackson and may be what led him to this style of splatter for his first films. Their first film-making success, if a consolation prize counts, was a rough and ready production for a school competition called **The Valley**. One of the judges commented that it was impressive, but the plot was almost non-existent. Jackson’s name was listed next to Special Effects, as well as Co Director. It won them \$100 in prize money.

After college, Jackson got a menial job with the Evening Post newspaper as a photo-engraver. It wasn’t the special effects job he wanted, but at least it was an income. He realized that 8mm was simply not going to turn him into a professional film maker. The next step up was 16mm, and he purchased a second hand Bolex camera. With this he shot **Roast of the Day**, a little film about a village full of cannibals that was to grow into **Bad Taste**.

He intended that the film should be knocked off over a few weekends, but gradually the plot and filming time was extended. Jackson drew on the talents of his friends from the newspaper to fill the main acting roles.

After seeing the low budget cult movie **Evil Dead**, Jackson decided that Roast of the Day may have more potential than he at first thought. The plot continued to evolve (some would say disintegrate). The title became **Giles' Big Day**. The cannibals became aliens, and went through a number of changes in their appearance. And still it dragged on. Gradually the members of the cast moved on with their lives, and the money began to run out. Appeals to the NZ Film Commission were fruitless, until the Commission's Jim Booth decided to have a look at this film which had now grown out to 75 minutes. He appeared to like the film, even in its rough unfinished state, but he asked filmmaker Tony Hiles to give a second opinion. Hiles was enthusiastic, so payments were doled out to Jackson to get the film, now renamed **Bad Taste**, finished.

It was not the Commission's idea of a feature film, so Booth handed over the money in small payments so the project would not have to go before the full Board for approval. This got the film to the rough cut stage, and it finally went to the Board for funding to complete it. The Board was doubtful. *"...weaknesses include minimal acting talent, and characters who are unsympathetic and crude. The film includes a lot of misjudged humour, which could be enjoyed by the crassest of audiences..."*

With help from Tony Hiles, the final week of filming was completed in 1986. Post production took further time, and when it came to adding a soundtrack and dubbing the voices, the first script finally appeared. Previously the film had just had bits added to it as ideas appeared.



Peter Jackson at work on Bad Taste



A Sexy character from Meet the Feebles

In 1988 Bad Taste was launched at the Cannes Film Festival. The Commission's lack of enthusiasm was notable, with Bad Taste last in their catalogue. According to Tony Hiles, the entire promotion budget totaled \$112.50. In the following months sales picked up as the word spread. Since Bad Taste started with such a low budget, it didn't take long for it to go into profit. The film never got into mainstream cinemas, being shown at late night sessions or specialist cinemas. It quickly became a cult movie. It was loved by the French and Australians, ignored by the British, banned by the Canadians, not released at all by the Germans, and was too extreme for the U.S. Yet it continued to sell into the cult market, first on videotape, and later on DVD.

Unlike the haphazard production of Bad Taste, the next film **Meet The Feebles** was roughed out as an audio track before production started. It was conceived as a fill-in while a zombie film, **Braindead**, was being put together. The voices of puppet characters helped Jackson to visualize his film, so this time he had a plot, a script, and an idea of what the characters should look like. He had learnt a lot from Bad Taste. The characters were designed largely by Cameron Chittock, who had worked on the special effects of Bad Taste.

Once again, the Film Commission declined to support the film. This was not surprising – knife-throwing junkie frogs, machine-gun-wielding hippos, and porno movie-making rats was not what New Zealand was about. Chittock, Jackson and the other writers decided to fund the film themselves. Filming coincided with the release of Bad Taste in Cannes.

Although the Film Commission would not support Feebles, Jim Booth once again tried to help Jackson raise finance by pretending to be the film's producer. A Japanese company put in \$150,000 for pre-sale rights to Feebles as well as backing Braindead. Filming was about to start on Braindead when a major backer pulled out. The crew decided to expand Feebles to a feature-length film and continue its production instead. Like Bad Taste, Meet The Feebles (the new working title) would be a self-funded low budget film. It would come in at about one sixth of the cost of Braindead, so was within their reach. Filming was scheduled for March 1989, to go to about August, when Braindead should be able to start once more. Again they approached the Film Commission for funding. The Commission was now in dire straits, and needed some funding itself. In spite of the lack of a full script for the feature-length Feebles and a lot of doubts about the film's content, they bravely agreed to loan WingNut, Jackson's company, \$500,000 .

The Japanese backers wanted to release in October, so they had three weeks to write the script and seven weeks to shoot it. To flesh out the film it was necessary to make the characters grosser than was anticipated. Nothing was too revolting. There was only one stipulation from Jackson. The film had to finish with a lot of characters being blown away in a machine gun bloodbath as the finale. Many new members for the crew were roped in to write songs and record the voices. The reaction of the Film Commission Board to the new script can only be imagined, but in the end their only doubts were about the subplot involving Trevor the rat and his porno-movie-making venture with Madam

Bovine, the pierced-nippled cow. And this from a Board which was required to take community standards into account when funding a film! Does this say something about New Zealanders?

The desperate schedule pushed everyone to their limit. Weeks behind schedule, freezing cold, fleas, untrained staff, special effects that didn't work – everything went wrong. It was only the sense of fun the movie engendered in the crew that kept it going. Inexperience could be overcome by temporary fixes and sheer enthusiasm. Pressure was on for the film to be finished. It was released in New Zealand in September 1990, almost a year after the Japanese backers had contracted. The film attracted attention around the world. It did not, however, make money. In spite of video sales and releases in 30 countries, it was just too gross for most reviewers and the publicity was not favorable. Only in Japan and Australia was it received enthusiastically.

The puppetry and effects were noticed within the film industry. Jackson was invited to Hollywood and job offers were discussed. He declined these, wanting to get Braindead off the ground. It was just as well. In the cutthroat mass-production Hollywood industry, Jackson's lack of experience would have quickly got him into trouble. There was a bonus from the meetings, though. He briefly met Robert Shaye, the boss of New Line Cinema. Although nothing came of it at the time, their paths crossed again later. While Braindead was in limbo, Jackson and co-writer Mulheron (who played Heidi the Hippo in Feebles) worked on the script of *Nightmare on Elm Street*, as well as a script for a new film of their own called Blubberhead.

Babies in Blenders– a unique scene from Braindead !



Every film producer seems to have a zombie film in them, but in Jackson's case it was to be a comedy. This is an unusual approach, and the only serious (bad choice of words there) contender for zombie comedy so far was **Return of the Living Dead** (1985). There were plenty of zombie films, but most had the standard slow-moving, brainless zombie. Jackson gave some of his zombies a personality of sorts. He even made some of them seem a little sad, as in the doomed love affair between the nurse and the karate kicking minister (*"I kick arse for God!"*).

The original idea came from Stephen Sinclair. With the film taking so long to finance Stephen, Peter and Fran Walsh (later to be his long-term



companion) were able to fill in the gap in the middle and produce a working script. Gradually the story of henpecked Lionel, the girl he loves, and his domineering mother took shape. Lionel's mother is bitten by a Sumatran Rat Monkey (which looks suspiciously like Trevor the Rat from *Feebles*) and she turns into a zombie, with bits dropping off along the way. Visitors to the house become infected and Lionel builds up a collection of zombies in his cellar. Then they all break loose. Can Lionel save his girlfriend, armed only with his trusty lawnmower?

A Spanish company wanted to invest in the film, but on condition that the lead be played by Diana Penálver, a young Spanish actress. Although the finance fell through, Diana had been written into the plot and stayed to do the film. The Japanese company that financed *Feebles* also put money into *Braindead*, and the NZ Film Commission agreed to put up half the cost. It looked like it was going to happen.

Braindead forced changes in the way Jackson made his films. They were no longer low-budget one-man fun films, and the production had to be more professional. Jackson wanted to control the special effects as well as direct the film. He worked with Cameron Chittock who had done the heads for *Bad Taste*. Jackson realized that he was taking on too much, and simply didn't have enough time, so he left Australian Bob McCarron to handle the effects.

With six weeks to shooting, the Spanish investors pulled out and *Feebles* was put into production instead. Although *Feebles* was a disorganized disaster, it forced Jackson to realise the importance of the story to a film. *Feebles* was an entire series of special effects, with a very thin story to link it together. He had been affected by a 1988 seminar of storytelling and scriptwriting run by American Robert McKee, and McKee's ideas strongly influenced the more

polished storyline of *Braindead*. Filming finally started on *Braindead* in 1991. Most shooting was done at Avalon Studios, and the use of a real studio made making the film so much easier. The studio was about to see more blood and gore than it could have imagined. There was so much maple-syrup-and-food-colouring blood that feet stuck to floors, holes were cut in the floors so the mess could be hosed off, and the studio laid boards over the corridor floors to stop it being ground in permanently.

Jackson also relinquished some control and had two crews filming at the same time. This would speed up production dramatically. In spite of this, the budget was in danger of being blown out and production dropped behind schedule. By November the filming was substantially finished and was not too far over budget. Post production began on cutting the film and recording the soundtrack and musical score, but still Jackson was adding scenes to the film such as the walk in the park with the zombie baby. He later admitted this scene was not really necessary,

The film was presented at the Cannes Film Festival and was an instant hit. In the U.S. it was released as *Dead Alive*. The *Brain Dead* title was already in use on a Bill Paxton horror / comedy. Reviews were generally favorable, but once again it had only limited showings and quickly became another cult film. The biggest problem was that Trimark had released the film unrated. Blockbuster, America's biggest video chain, would not handle unrated films. Twenty minutes was cut from the film for the German censors, and it had been thoroughly butchered in the process.

It looked like the same thing might happen in the U.S. to satisfy Blockbuster. Richard Jordan of Trimark's post production unit got the unenviable job of cutting it to an R rating. It lost twelve minutes and a lot of its impact, but at least it got released. Once again, Jackson's film made its greatest success as a video. One little touch that I liked was the playing of "God Save The Queen" at the start of the film – it set the film in the 50's and may have been Jackson's sly dig at the old-fashioned attitudes that were offended by his films.

Meanwhile, his lust for blood satisfied, he turned to another project. In 1954 two NZ schoolgirls, Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme, were charged with the murder of Pauline's mother.

The two girls had formed a possibly lesbian relationship that drifted into fantasy. When Mr. Hulme was caught in an affair he arranged to return to England, taking Juliet with him. The girls proposed that Pauline should accompany them, but Mrs. Parker refused. The girls decided she would have to die.

The court case fascinated New Zealanders. Books were written about it and screenplays were prepared. Plays were produced, some sympathetic to the girls, some not. It was kept fresh in the minds of New Zealanders, and it is not surprising that it attracted Fran Walsh and Peter Jackson. What was going on in the girls' minds? They began researching and put together a screenplay. There were at least four other groups working on screenplays. In 1992 Jackson's **Heavenly Creatures** was granted conditional funding of two million dollars by the Film Board. Jackson's comment was *"It made me aware of the responsibility we had. There was only going to be one film made, and we had to do it right"*.

Many doubted that he could do it. German producer Hanno Huth bought most of the English-speaking rights to the film, based on his admiration for *Brain Dead*. He beat U.S. company Miramax. With funding assured, production could begin. Casting for the British characters introduced young actress Kate Winslet, who only had some TV and stage work at this time. A theatre actress, Diana Kent, filled the part of Mrs Hulme. Clive Merrison was so close in appear-

ance to Henry Hulme that he was a natural for the part. The New Zealand part of Pauline was filled by schoolgirl Melanie Lynskey.

Where possible Jackson shot the film in the original locations. Some crew and actors felt they were not just making a film, but reliving history. The spookiness was especially strong when it came to filming the murder at the original scene. In the end, it was filmed a short distance away. The filming of this scene took three days, a traumatic period for all involved. Further trauma occurred with the death of Jim Booth of cancer. From the man at the Film Board who had faith in an unknown director to producer of three Jackson films, Booth had been the organization man to temper Jackson's inexperience. *Heavenly Creatures* was dedicated to him.

The film was now being held by Miramax, who had bought the rights for most of the world from Huth. It was not ready in time for Cannes, and there was a certain hostility to a director of splatter movies, so Miramax held it off until the Venetian Film Festival. If it was successful they would buy the distribution rights to the U.S. as well. Miramax cut about ten minutes from the film, cuts which Jackson later admitted improved it. The film succeeded beyond what anyone had hoped for. Critics worldwide applauded *Heavenly Creatures*. Jackson's reputation had now blossomed from king of splatter to that of talented crafter of serious films.

Jackson's next project was a collaboration with Costa Botes, an immigrant director. **Forgotten Silver** was an idea that Jim Booth was looking at while *Heavenly Creatures* was in production.

It is a made-for-TV "mockumentary" that purports to chronicle the early New Zealand film pioneers through the life of one Colin MacKenzie.

It featured battle scenes from throughout history, the American Civil War, Roman times, just about anything they could fit in. It even had a segment proving that a New Zealander had flown an aircraft before the Wright Brothers. These were all acted out by local people as "McKenzie" traveled around New Zealand.

Melanie Lynskey and Kate Winslet in *Heavenly Creatures*.



Enough information was let slip that on October 29, 1995, its TV premiere was watched by an estimated 440,000 viewers. There were complaints from viewers who didn't realize it was a spoof, and more complaints objecting to the use of the documentary as entertainment. Comments from viewers ranged from calls for Jackson to be shot to people who called it the best entertainment in ten years. In 1996 the film won a special Critics Prize at the Venice Film Festival. Forgotten Silver used the facilities of Weta Workshops, a new company that Jackson was establishing to create special effects. It had its first trial with Heavenly Creatures, but the need for such a company was realized during the early days of Brain Dead. Special effects were created using models, puppets and masks. Computers, such as they were at this time, could not handle effects – in fact they were barely able to handle the work required in Heavenly Creatures.

The first system could handle about ten seconds worth of film. Although this was bought by WingNut, a meeting of Jackson, Jim Booth, Jamie Selkirk, Tania Rodger, Richard Taylor and George Port decided to establish the separate company exclusively for special effects. It would be funded by profits from WingNut's films. The name WETA is for WingNut Effects and Technical Allusions. Although the company was oriented towards traditional model making and masks, digital work soon took more and more of the production facilities. They got overseas movie contracts, and did most of the special effects for the best-forgotten TV series **Xena Warrior Princess** and its even more dreadful spinoff **Hercules**. The company was in constant work since its inception and even had to contract out some work to another company.

By 1993 Weta had outgrown the house in which it was established. They bought a warehouse in Miramar, a Wellington suburb, and moved in with an extra six million dollars worth of Silicon Graphics computer equipment for Jackson's next film. Spare space in the building became Camperdown Studios, to give Wingnut a base for its studio work.

A popular TV horror series, **Tales From The Crypt**, was proving a moneymaker for Universal Studios. Jackson and Fran Walsh knocked up a two-page outline of a possible episode about a conman, Frank Bannister, who rids houses of ghosts. The ghosts are real, and he can talk to them. They will haunt the house for him, then he will re-

move them for a fee. Then another ghost starts killing people and Bannister is blamed. Robert Zemeckis, a director of *Crypt*, liked it but suggested that they should expand it into a full feature that they would co-produce. Jackson agreed, and suggested that it be made in New Zealand. Zemeckis, busy editing **Forrest Gump** at the time, agreed. The studio's main requirement was that the film should look like it was set in a U.S. town.

Michael J Fox thought the script for **The Frighteners** was weird. But then so were the scripts for **Back To The Future**, on which he had made his career. Trini Alvarado got the role as Dr Lucy Lynskey. An inspired choice was Jeffrey Combs (**ReAnimator**) as the demented FBI agent who believes Bannister is a murderer. Jake Busey as the ghostly serial killer who is trying to beat the world record, even from beyond the grave, is convincing and menacing. Jackson invited the cast to a brainstorming session one day and asked what they would like to see in the script.

This approach was unheard of but the ideas flowed and the film was better for it. Although Universal worried about the constant rewrites, they stuck with Jackson and let him have his freedom. Partly this was because the lower costs in New Zealand meant that it was well within the Hollywood-scale budget anyway, and partly because some "shooting days" on the schedule were actually for special effects work in Weta.

The special effects nearly broke the project. Weta was behind time and over budget. Once again, Jackson was taking on too much of the

Michael J Fox and his Ghostly Friends





without work and Jackson without a current project. He was also squabbling with the Film Commission. The fight became more bitter as time went on, partly fuelled by their refusal to fund his proposed film **Pink Frost**. He was also falling out with the media. Due to pressure of work he had kept most journalists off the set of Heav-

work himself and needed some expert help to keep the project going. Universal liked what they had seen so they sent Wes Takahashi over from the U.S. to get the effects back on track. He arranged a loan of workstations and staff from Industrial Light And Magic and a six million dollar funding top-up. In return the film's release date was moved forward. The final cost was around 30 million dollars for Universal. At that price it was a bargain for them. In 1996 Zemeckis flew to New Zealand to see the two-hour rough cut of the film. The contract specified that he had the right of "final cut" – he could do the final edit of the film, even over the objections of the producer if necessary. This is a very nervous moment for any producer. Zemeckis made suggestions, then left Jackson without actually making any cuts. His comment was :*"Finish the film as you want. I've made my comments"*. As it turned out, the film had to be cut quite heavily to get the PG13 rating that Universal wanted for the U.S., but no matter what they cut, it would still be R-rated for violence. In the end some scenes were restored and others were beefed back up.

When the film opened at 1669 theatres across America it competed against **Independence Day** and the Olympic Games. This was a deliberate attempt by Universal to win viewers from the Olympics, and it only partly succeeded. The film took eight million dollars in the first week, but Independence Day hit it hard.

In spite of this, it was noticed by the critics. Comments were around 50:50 positive to negative. Universal, however, was quite satisfied. Commercially the film was initially a loser, but not a disaster. Universal's head of distribution accepted the responsibility, and Jackson was still in favour.

While **Fighters** was in production Universal offered Jackson a chance to remake **King Kong**, his favorite film. The project was then shelved due to the release of **Mighty Joe Young** and the **Godzilla** remake. This left Weta

enly Creatures, and those that were allowed into the studios signed non-disclosure agreements about whatever they may have seen. Such as a secret project that he was developing. It soon became public knowledge that he was working on a film of Tolkien's books. The media staked out the film sites, publishing long-distance shots of the sets. Some information slipped out of the Film Commission, which was organizing substantial funds and tax breaks. Jackson's personal life was no longer private. Miramax had the rights to Tolkien's books but did not have funds to do the film on the monumental scale needed. They wanted Jackson to scale it back to two films for a total of around three hours. Into the gap stepped Bob Shaye of New Line Cinema, mentioned earlier. He asked why Jackson wasn't making the film in three parts, since that was how the books were written? With New Line's backing, the project was off the ground. On August 24, 1998, New Line announced a three-film **Lord Of The Rings**.

Instead of doing the concept work himself, Jackson turned to a young group of designers to settle the look of Middle Earth. He employed experts in armour and costume. Particularly he employed John Howe, a weapons historian and



Peter Jackson on the Set of The Lord of the Rings



artist who had done many Rings paintings, and Alan Lee, a British artist who had illustrated The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings. In the hills of the Waikato region they created Hobbiton. As well as the filming, most of the computer work, weapons and costumes would be done in New Zealand. This was a huge undertaking for a small country that just barely had a film industry. Weta was committed to this project and none of its staff had the experience necessary to even cost it accurately. Attention to detailed costing was critical, down to the last arrow and belt buckle. The success or failure would affect more than Weta, too. New Line had been taken over by Time Warner, and its future depended on Rings being successful.

Casting began. In an online question session, Jackson admitted that so far they had no American accents. He was concerned this may alienate U.S. audiences. Gradually, through this sort of interaction, the fans became more involved in the films. Jackson revealed that he would concentrate on unknown actors.

Casting for the different races was strongly appearance-based – the Hobbits had to be short and rounded and the elves taller and more angular. Finding actors with the right body types meant selecting some with no film experience, but gradually each role was filled. So too were the jobs of the thousands of extras needed for battle scenes. In October 1998 filming finally began, after two missed dates.

Shooting three films back to back was a chal-

lenge few directors would take on. Jackson felt that there must be time savings in doing it this way, but he admitted later that he was wrong. It was just three times harder, and filming was behind schedule. He learned his lesson from earlier films, and now had a second unit working, filling in minor shots. He had to add two more units to catch up, then more. At one point nine separate film units were at work. Actors were ferried from unit to unit, and Jackson was only able to keep control by satellite link.

Sound recording was a disaster. The studios were under Wellington airport's flight path and they were not soundproofed. Most sound was overdubbed later. Stuart Townsend (Aragorn) was replaced early in the filming by Viggo Mortensen, who had not even read Tolkien's books. Scripts were rewritten even as they were filming, which was hell for the actors. Fortunately they had input into the script, and their goodwill enabled it all to work. Although Jackson tried to film under some sort of security; leaks were a constant problem. The fan websites were printing rumours – some of which came from film staff and New Line executives. It was a balancing act between keeping the fans happy, and maintaining some elements of surprise for the films. Press conferences were rare, invitations to view the filming almost non-existent.



Hobbits, Hobbits everywhere...



There was more at stake than when the film began. As well as New Line's future, Weta was deeply involved and also depended on the films' success.

New Line's original projected budget of around \$130 million finished up more like \$320 million.

It must be remembered, though, that this figure is still comparable with that of three major films. To offset this, around \$160 million was covered by merchandising deals and a large investment by a German company. Even so, when New Line executives flew to New Zealand in June 2001 to see a rough cut of the first film, they must have been relieved to see how good it was.

Fellowship of the Rings premiered in London on December 10, 2001. Within a few weeks the returns made it the eighth most successful film of the year. By the end of 2002 it was seventh biggest film of all time. This success was followed by the rest of the series. The Two Towers premiered in New York in December 2002, and The Return of the King in Wellington in December 2003. There was one minor silly note.

Some viewers, apparently not knowing that the books were over forty years old, bagged The Two Towers as a cheap attempt to capitalize on the World Trade Center attack.

DVD allowed the inclusion of extra scenes and a lot of "behind the scenes" and "the making of...". A film geek like Jackson loved this approach as it allowed him to include shots which were left out of the film version, and the Extras disks are almost as entertaining as the films themselves.

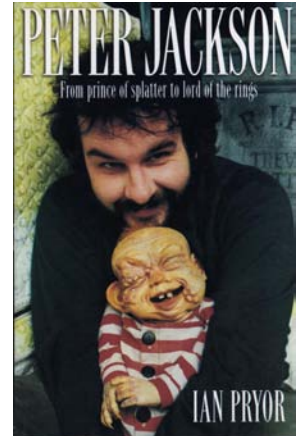
Profits from DVD sales continue. Jackson is putting his profits into expanding facilities for film post-production in New Zealand.

The current project appears to be The Hobbit, the first Tolkien novel, but who knows what else may come from that fertile imagination?

"The movie is what it is. I don't analyse it. I watch it, and I'm happy, and I'm more interested in what to do next"

Recommended Books

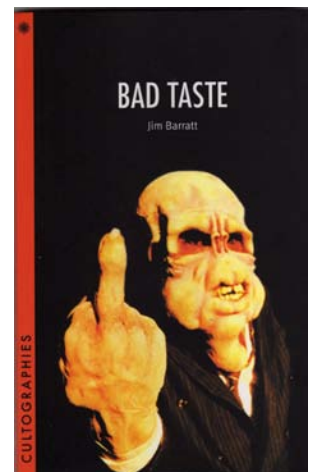
**Peter Jackson
From Prince of
Splatter to Lord of
the Rings
Random House
New Zealand 2003**



Author Ian Pryor covers Peter Jackson's history from his childhood, through his growing maturity as a film maker, to his final position as one of the world's leading fantasy producers. The book has great depth and detail and will cover almost anything you might want to know about Jackson and his associates.

He does not forget the actors and effects people who helped forge the films, and you will get a better understanding of the politics, both government and industry, of filmmaking. Pryor does not appear to have been on Jackson's Favorite People list, and much of his material has been gathered from non-WingNut sources. This tends to make the book more authentic.

**Bad Taste
Wallflower Press,
London and New
York, 2008.**



From the Cultography series, this little book examines in depth the phenomenon that was Peter Jackson's first film. Author Jim Barratt has a background in research at the UK Film Council and the British Board of Film Classification, and is well-placed to discuss the film from a viewer's (and a Censor's) perspective.

He points out that the film's humour appealed to the Board over its gruesome content, and it was passed uncut for Britain.



Forgotten Silver
1995

New Zealand

Wingnut Films.

Various Releases including Anchor Bay & First Run Pictures

Written and Directed by Peter Jackson, Costa Botes

Widescreen, enhanced for 16:9

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

In the previous article we looked at New Zealand filmmaker Peter Jackson and his film history. One film mentioned, but which I haven't seen until now, was a made-for-TV documentary called **Forgotten Silver**. The DVD is a little difficult to find, but it is still available and a copy has now turned up.

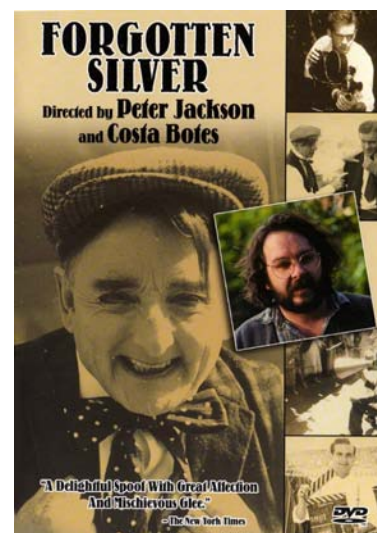
Forgotten Silver is the story of pioneer New Zealand filmmaker Colin McKenzie in the early 1900s. The story was written by Peter Jackson and fellow NZ director Costa Botes, but was put on hold for some years while Jackson's other film project (Bad Taste) got under way. It finally went into production after NZTV and the New Zealand Film Board offered to fund a range of TV specials of about one hour in length. **Forgotten Silver** was accepted.

Colin McKenzie's story is both heroic and tragic. Rare surviving footage discovered in a trunk in

his widow's garden shed shows his early bicycle powered camera and his later steam powered model. It also shows his successful attempt at making the world's first colour film. A brief clip using a chemical from a rare Hawaiian shrub was

used, and the short 1911 clip made for promotion of colour featured topless Hawaiian ladies swimming. When he showed it in New Zealand it was enough for him and his brother to be found guilty of publishing a lewd document and getting six months in jail. It was fortunate that he had the camera and film technology refined, as he was able to film New Zealand's first powered flight. This took place nine months before the Wright Brothers flew. Unfortunately he also caused New Zealand's first plane crash as the aircraft swerved to miss his film crew, hit a hedge and disintegrated.

Colin and his brother moved on to grand things, with plans to make a feature film on the story of



Salome, from the Bible. His brother starred in the film, but there was a complication. Both Colin and his brother fell in love with the leading lady. With the outbreak of the first World War, Colin's brother enlisted and was killed in the abortive Gallipoli landing. Colin, deeply depressed, disappeared into the wild country of New Zealand's Southland for three years.

When he returned to civilization it was to announce that filming of Salome would recommence in a new elaborate city-set that he had built in a remote mountain valley. The film was plagued by shortage of funds and filming was regularly interrupted while Colin contracted out to a local comedian, Stan Wilson, to film his "Stan The Man" silent movie acts. This source of funding finished when Stan smacked the New Zealand Premier in the face with a custard pie and was savagely beaten by the police (all the while, Colin kept on filming with a concealed camera).

He also fell in love with his leading lady again, and as filming neared its conclusion it was found that she was pregnant to him. Short of funds once again, Colin turned to a U.S. investor who liked the Biblical style of Salome. The advance kept the film going almost until the final scene, but tragedy struck again. Unable to keep up with the frantic pace of filming, Colin's wife and unborn child died in childbirth. Then the stock market crash came, and his U.S. investor lost his fortune. Colin, desperate for funds to finish the film, secured money from the new Russian Communist government through the New Zealand Communist Party. He had to refilm the story to leave out all mention of religion and convert it to a tale of evil capitalism being thwarted by a young "working girl".

In the U.S., his previous investor's assets had been taken over by the Palermo Brothers, a notorious syndicate who now wanted all the film handed over to them. The Russians were also pressing for the film to be handed over to them. Colin did the only thing he could do – he buried the film and left New Zealand, never to return.

He next appeared as a news cameraman in the Spanish Civil War, where he met and married a young New Zealand nurse. Hannah McKenzie, when she returned to NZ, kept all Colin's film in the old trunk from where it was reclaimed sixty years later by Peter Jackson. Just before the documentary was released, a single reel of film from a Spanish archive turned up, showing Colin at the front of one of the war's most sav-

age battles. He puts his camera down to go out under fire to help an injured soldier to safety, and is killed by machinegun fire.

The film of his epic "Salome" was only recovered after Peter Jackson, Costa Botes and a group of intrepid explorers managed to retrace McKenzie's path to his lost city in the remote forest. Through the N Z Film Commission, they set about restoring and editing the film so it could finally be released. Colin McKenzie was hailed as an unsung New Zealand hero of pioneer cinematography.

The whole show was a spoof. Colin McKenzie never existed, and the entire "history" was concocted and filmed by Botes and Jackson. There are plenty of clues in the show, such as McKenzie's invention of 35mm film (actually invented in 1892 by Thomas Edison and William Dickson) and the remarkably sharp and clear "enhancement" of a frame showing a dated newspaper in a workman's pocket during the first flight. The cast of the film proved to be very diligent at keeping the true nature of the film secret until its release. In spite of this, thousands of people gathered for a Film Festival opening took part in six minutes of footage which was later purported to be the launch of Colin's McKenzie's "Salome".

The documentary's credibility was aided and abetted by comments in the film by cooperative NZ actor Sam Neill, by Harvey Wallstein of Miramax Films, and by film historian Leonard Maltin. With people of this caliber supporting it, the film had to be genuine, didn't it? Or did it? As the PR stills were released showing "the making of", the euphoria changed. Sometimes the reaction was savage, with callers to the TV station urging that those responsible should be shot. Others complained that they could never trust a documentary film again. The film faded into obscurity, and Jackson went on to make other films.

The DVD has a good range of extras. The (true this time, I think) documentary "Behind The Bull" details the making of the film. Jackson said "...it was really low budget and it was made with a spirit of low budget film making that I don't get to do very often these days..." There is one more Colin McKenzie surprise hidden in the deleted scenes, but I won't spoil it for you. The film's recreation of early silent movie footage is brilliant. As a rare example of a mockumentary that really worked, this DVD is well worth tracking down.

BaadAsssss Cinema



Coffy

Blaxploitation is a difficult word, it was originally a derogative term chosen by NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) and other black rights organisations to characterize films which they believed exploited black people through stereotypes, the term being a combination of black and exploitation.

At the same time a large number of black people believed that such films, which began in the 1970's with **Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song** and **Shaft**, actually presented black people on screen for the first time in roles which represented the truth of everyday life for an urban black audience.

These movies included honest, if not at times exaggerated and perhaps even stereotyped, coverage of drugs, sex, violence. As well as a commentary on the harsh relationship between the black community and the police.

Blaxploitation includes several types of films, including crime (**Foxy Brown**, **Coffy** etc), action and crime (**Three the Hard Way**, **Shaft**), horror (**Abby** – a strange and quirky Exorcist rip-off), comedy (**Uptown Saturday Night**) and a few others. At first these were films which were made by "blacks for blacks" with a soundtrack packed with soul music. However as time went on Hollywood saw that a buck could be made and moved in on the act and a wide range of filmmakers took to the genre.

It was at this stage that many of the films to become loaded down with negative stereotypes. These range from a strong emphasis on ghetto culture with its prostitutes, pimps and drug dealers. As well as a focus violence and a nearly uniform portrayal of the white authorities and police as corrupt.

It was during this period that a major controversy over Blaxploitation began. While audiences flocked to them and even the film industry gave them rave reviews, conservative power brokers within the black community took terrible offense. The battle lines were drawn and in many cases the actors and actresses were treated as pariahs in their own communities. It seems politics took precedent over making a living.

Newspaper columns were written, protests were held and Hollywood got nervous. In the end this clash pretty well caused the end of the golden age of Blaxploitation which went from around 1970 to 1976.





During the Nineties a revival in cult cinema began and Blaxploitation became appreciated for what it was. This was primarily due to two major films. **Original Gangstas** which was independently financed outside the Hollywood system and starred Pam Grier, Richard Roundtree, Fred Williamson, and Jim Brown and Quentin Tarantino's homage to Blaxploitation starring Pam Grier, **Foxy Brown**.

Today Blaxploitation is enjoyed on many levels.

Certainly it is a reflection of the social changes which took place during the tumultuous Seventies. This includes a reinvention by African Americans of their own culture by reclaiming stereotypes which were once pejorative for themselves.

At the same time it is also loads of fun packed with sex, violence and outrageous and bizarre plots. It is too easy to become all philosophical about the genre when its primary aim was to entertain. It should also be noted that heading towards the end of the Blaxploitation period (and into the Eighties and onwards after its demise) in desperation Blaxploitation films sunk to new and ridiculous depths ranging from **Blacula** to **Blankenstein** and these are truly so bad they are incredibly entertaining !

**BaadAsssss Cinema:
A Bold Look at
70s Blaxploitation
Cinema
Docorama
IFC New Video
R1 DVD**

Filmmaker Isaac Julien's documentary **BaadAsssss Cinema: A Bold Look at 70s Blaxploitation Films** is an intelligent multi-faceted examination of the Blaxploitation genre. It examines it from the perspective of cinema, history, black rights and the personal stories of those involved. It packs a lot into a doco which runs a shade under an hour.

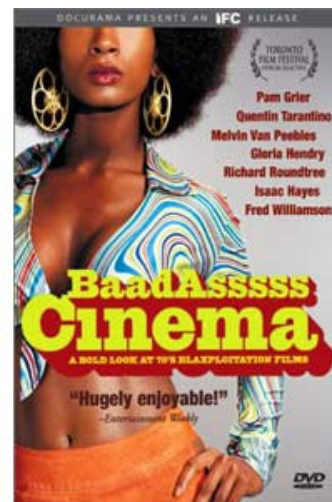
Julien uses a range of pertinent interviews with some of the genres biggest stars, among them Melvin Van Peebles; Gloria Hendry, Richard Roundtree; Fred Williamson and Pam Grier. He intersperses these with a very wide selection of superb movie clips and images.

He also offers interviews with a range of critics and scholars looking at the period from various angles even including Afeni Shakur, mother of the late rapper Tupac.

My only criticism of these was that I felt the feminist social commentator Bell Books was more concerned with discussing her own agenda than the films in question and she could have easily been edited out and more significant content included.

I also felt that there was so much interesting material that the doco could clearly have been extended to 90 even 120 minutes without losing a beat.

Quentin Tarantino offers some great insights from the perspective of a filmmaker looking at the genre from a cinematic rather than political perspective and injects a "cult cinema" aficionado view into a discussion which could have easily become bogged down in high end cinema criticism and politics. (Sometimes a film is just a film!) . His opinions are certainly significant since he helped trigger a revival of interest in the genre with his homage film **Jackie Brown** !



This is a fascinating documentary which while allowing the filmmakers to speak for themselves also does not shy away from the stereotypes which are shown within them and the immense political upheavals which brought about the explosion of black cinema and later, for a time at least, destroyed it. At present it is a US title only.

In Australia Dark Horse Entertainment has a nice range of Blaxploitation titles and hence it would be good to have a look at a few of them.

Black Sister's Revenge

Emma Mae is a young woman from rural Mississippi who goes to live with her aunt and family in Compton following the death of her mother.



Naive and unsure of herself she finds herself a man on the first day in town, but he is not the sort you would take home to mother.

His name is Jesse, a pill-popping dopehead who's wanted by the cops. Emma Mae soon finds herself in a hostage situation that ends with the arrest of Jesse and his mate Zeke. Their bail is set at \$5000 each, and she's determined to raise it. She tries various legal means but to no avail so she does what anyone would do if down on their luck – she robs a bank !!

Sadly, however, Emma Mae learns that Jesse has been using her all along; she decides it is time to take revenge and Jesse doesn't have any idea what is about to hit him !

Soul Vengeance

Charles is a dope dealer who only just gets by, he gets busted by an obsessive, racist cop who almost completely castrates him along the way.

Abandoned by his friends and family and abused by the authori-



Charles teaches us that a big weapon is a dangerous weapon !

ties, Charles serves three horrible years in solitary confinement before he is paroled.

Charles gets a much different "welcome home" than the one he expected; during the three years he has been away his world has been turned upside down.

His girl is now a stripper and with his best mate and his rather naive younger brother is now a lot older but not too much wiser and in a gang. Charles, however, notices something very strange. As he recovers from his injuries he finds that his "member" has achieved an amazing strength and length!

Slowly, the humiliations of his past and the way he has been treated by those around him drive his mind to breaking point and he decides to take his revenge on the world – however, his weapon is rather novel, his super long member !!

Now let's be clear, this isn't just any large piece of manhood, in one scene Charles' manhood elongates to about thirty feet and wraps around the someone's neck !!

This truly is bizarre Blaxploitation cinema at its most unusual !

Penitentiary

He's too fast, two fisted, TOO SWEET!

Penitentiary is considered a potent and powerful work of Blaxploitation, while it and its sequel Penitentiary II are really outside the traditional "Blaxploitation" heyday of 1970-1976

(**Penitentiary** was made in 1980), they both proved the genre still had a lot of life in it.

Jamaa Fanaka created a very powerful indictment of urban life and the effect of prisons on the black community.

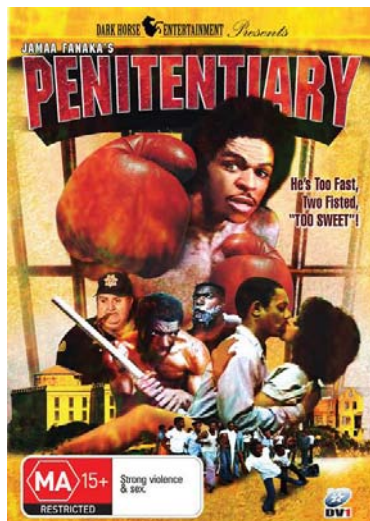
It was and is a very powerful independent film and combined a strident social commentary with wallops of powerful violence.

The film tells the story of Martel Gordone, a hitch-hiker who gets into a fight with a pair of bikers who are beating up a prostitute. One of the bikers dies and Martel finds himself in prison with the moniker "Too Sweet" because of his love of candy bars. (umm ! This surely has a another meaning)

Soon he is a hardened inmate who joins the prison boxing team in an effort to secure an early parole. It seems the prison guard's brother-in-law can pull strings on the parole board, but only winning boxers will get the chance.

But things aren't as easy as they seem. He is forced to defend himself against the various prison gangs he refuses to join and Half Deal Johnston, the leader of the worst of them all. He must also face off in the ring against Jesse, the most violent thug on the block to secure his freedom.

Lots of Aggro in Penitentiary



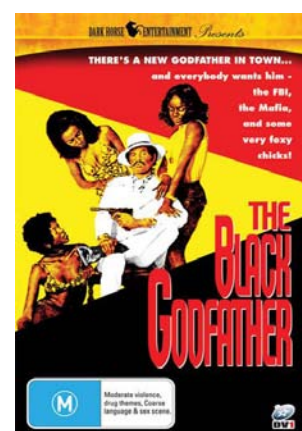
This is a superbly wild Blaxploitation film with all sorts of subplots ranging from male prison bitches to lots of sex in the prison restroom allowed by guards for a fee, there is an overload of violence and some pretty tough boxing.

At the same time it also has that very "Blaxploitation feel" with anal rapings, "the hole," inbred guards, transsexual inmates, bimbos in the restroom and so on and so on. In many ways time has made this a rather stereotyped film which nearly becomes a parody of itself, that, course, just makes it even more in demand today...

The Black Godfather

The Mafia boys may rule downtown, but uptown the Black Godfather controls the streets, and when the two gangs declare war over drug territories all Hell is sure to break loose.

J.J. is a hustler with a conscience, while he may dabble in prostitution he stands firmly against drugs.



While violence is a necessary evil, he does so with pious pithy dialogue such as "The essence of our struggle is independence," and "Money buys dignity—power is a crime," or "We're sick and tired of being exploited." Compliments are even exchanged among the gunmen for "protecting the brothers on the street" (by killing white pushers, of course !).

A violent confrontation with mobster Tony Burton leaves a friend dead. So reluctantly J.J. becomes the ally of local numbers king Nate Williams who teaches him how to dismantle Burton's drug operation brick by brick. But Burton's got a secret weapon: Det. Joe Sterling a crooked cop who's got the dirt on all the syndicates, is now Burton's lap dog. J.J. is in for the fight of his life for himself and his community.

The Black Godfather dates from 1974 and is packed with lots of killings, some occasional martial arts and lots of stereotypes !!

Dark Horse Entertainment

Web: <http://www.dv1.com.au>

There are many other views of Black Cinema, some are presented in new documentaries being released by MVD Visual (April 2009)

Black Hollywood: Blaxploitation and Advancing an Independent Black Cinema

Documentary exploring the role of black actors, black directors and the black audience in American movies.

Shot entirely on location in Hollywood in 1984, this feature documentary explores the role of black actors, black directors and the black audience in American movies. Remember the early 80s - hip hop had just been born, break dancing filled clubs and streets and Eddie Murphy and late great Richard Pryor were the only two black stars making it. In an action-packed showcase of clips and interviews, Diahnne Abbott, Rosalind Cash and Alfre Woodard talk about negative stereotyping. Jim Brown, Vonetta McGee and D'Urville Martin come up with alternative solutions to the one-way-street that was "blaxploitation" and discuss new ways of advancing an independent black cinema. There is a rare interview with Lorenzo Tucker, the Black Valentino, about his career with Oscar Micheaux. Joel Fluellen and Vincent Tubbs tell memorable stories of what life was like for the few blacks working in Hollywood in the 50s and 60s (including Dorothy Dandridge). There is a marvellous speech by Sidney Poitier on accepting the Black Hall of Fame "oscar". Griffiths' **Birth of A Nation** is panned. Grandmaster Flash and his "Message" is the theme tune and the writer Oscar Williams holds the whole show together with his advice to the creative outsider.

One Love: Words and Powah

Rastafarian religion has been much misunderstood and rarely celebrated with force and abandon. In these three documentary films, the late Jah Bones sets out the Rasta agenda and illustrates it with drums, music, poems and praises from dedicated Rasta interpreters like Jah Shepherd, Ras Anum Iyapo and Cosmo Ben Imho-

tep. Shot in London and Nottingham in the early 90s, the three films form a unique document of Rasta history, beliefs and artistic creation.

Part One:

Nyabinghi Blood & Fire - Filmed at the Rastafari Universal Zion HQ in Tottenham, London, nyabinghi is the sacred drumming ritual that calls on thunder, lightning, brimstone, blood and fire to burn and destroy the weakheart and promote the righteous. This is a once-in-a-blue-moon opportunity to see a real nyabinghi, with its spiritual African heartbeat, its verbal aggression to chant down Babylon, and its sheer power.

Part Two:

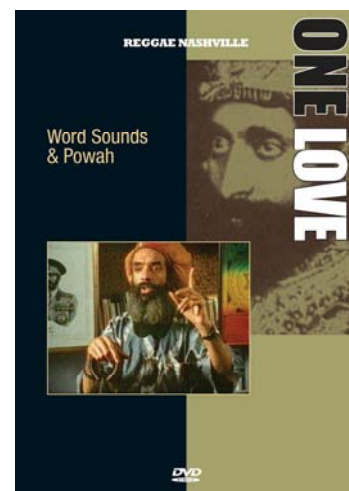
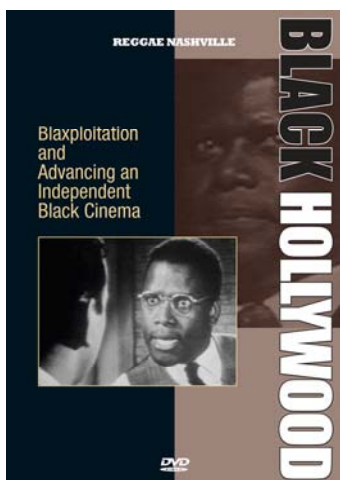
Blues For Rastafari - Shot mainly at the Simba Project, Woolwich, London, it deals with the historical dimension and roots of Rastafari - in the Empire of Kush, 400 BC in Central Africa, in the mix of African and Christian Biblical traditions during slavery, including pocomania in Jamaica, with the rise of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and the persecution of early pioneers in the maroon tradition like Howell at Pinnacle, Jamaica. It culminates in the reception given to Emperor Haile Selassie at Kingston Airport and the eventual globalization of the faith.

Part Three:

Word Sounds & Powah - Shot in London and at Matismela, in the Marcus Garvey Centre, Nottingham, this episode describes various notions of livity - Rasta as a way of life, as a life-force, as a sense of well-being, as a receptacle of love and creation, as humility in the face of human and corporate greed, and as a teaching which opposes isms and schisms. Musical interpretation is provided by The Naturalites, who, amongst other praises to Jah, sing their classic anthem Picture On The Wall.

MVD Visual

Web: <http://www.MVDb2b.com>



Not Quite Hollywood

Madman Entertainment
DVD Release January 2009
Web: <http://www.notquitehollywood.com.au>

Not Quite Hollywood is the ultimate guilty pleasure, it is the most fun I have watching a movie in the last year and I watch lots of films. It is a rip roaring roller coaster ride through the low brow world of Ozploitation, the world of Australian genre cinema.

This is a super fast paced doco made by Mark Hartley which is not only a homage to cult cinema but to Hartley's superb direction and editing style. He utilizes a library of rare footage to produce an unforgettable experience.

It is a doco which has the punch and style of an action film - filled to the brim with movie clips,



Scene from the infamous Turkey Shoot

action shots, nudity, explosions, violence, more nudity, interviews, kung fu and more nudity - it is an orgiastic banquet of 70s and 80s films. There are just so many cult classics which have been long forgotten which are now discussed in this truly affectionate yet irrelevant celebration. You leave the film savouring all the different flavours and wishing for more.

Australian genre films are those we may so often remember but pretend not to. While the art and period epics of Australian cinema were heralded as great masterpieces, these were the films that were lambasted by the critics but adored by the public and loved at the late night sessions of the local drive in.

They were reviled in the press, debated in the parliament, threatened by the censors and yet loved by both the counter culture and the movie going public. They were the films that people flocked to in droves while the puritans denounced them as bringing about the fall of



Australia's Patron Saint Dame Edna and Barry McKenzie



Dead End Drive-In

Western Civilization. Well, Western Civilization did not fall and while the wowzers still wail, the genre film is still here and still being fondly remembered and luckily, now are experiencing a bit of a renaissance.

Ranging from sex romps such as **Alvin Purple** and **Stork** to the crass humour of Barry Mackenzie and his first technicolour yawn on screen. From the action classics such as **Mad Max** and the **Man from Kong Kong** to offensive splatter classics such as **Turkey Shoot**, they are all here, remembered in their wild abandon and show in all their midnight glory.

It would be hard to list all the films covered but some include **Patrick**, **Thirst**, **Turkey Shoot**, **Stone**, **BMX Bandits**, **The Long Weekend**, **Mad Max**, **Fantasm**, **Howling III: The Marsupials**, **Mad Dog Morgan**, **Barry MacKenzie**, **Stork**, **Number 96** and lots and lots more. The director clearly has an encyclopaedic knowledge of Australia genre cinema of all sorts—biker, action, sex, cult, horror, comedy, splatter and exploitation.

Interspersed throughout this journey into the underbelly of cinema is a wide range of interviews ranging from such lovers of the medium as Quentin Tarantino, Richard Franklin, Dennis Hopper, Barry Humphries and George Miller to its staunchest critics in the like of Bob Ellis and Phillip Adams. Quentin Tarantino is especially memorable with his colourful dialogue, offhand comments and obvious adoration for the genre.

There are lots of wild gossip, rumours, juicy tit-

bits and memories as well as stories which were probably best not told “out of school”, but lovely to hear anyway ! I loved the tales of Dennis Hopper and his out of control behavior on the set of **Mad Dog Morgan** and the dangerous stunts performed for such films as **Mad Max** and other road movies.

At times it is like listening to a bunch of old friends reminiscing, so many of the interviews have a personal and conversational tone which invite us into the dialogue and make us part of the story.

Not Quite Hollywood has a marvelous direct quality as well as the enthusiasm of a director who is obviously a true film obsessive.

At the same time it is not all puff and ego stroking, there are lots of honest moments and blunt reflections on the dangers of “gonzo” filmmaking in a period when safety regulations were not existent and pretty well anything was fair game. It seems this was the period when actors and stunt men alike would take any risks necessary for their craft and many certainly paid for it in injuries from broken bones to burns and sometimes worse.

It is intelligent filmmaking, allowing the movies, memorabilia and film clips coupled with interviews tell the story, there is no overriding critical judgment, and thank god, no unnecessary film criticism.



Razorback



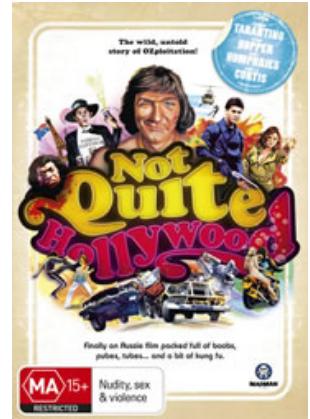
These were films made to shock the conservative cobwebs out of the psyche of a narrow Australia and they succeeded admirably. Many were great successes, others were dismal failures.

Sadly so many now are relegated to the selves of film archives and have never seen the light of day, even the most basic DVD release. This is an enthusiastic film which gets the motor running, it is excitable, energetic and infectious.

There is also a serious side to **Not Quite Hollywood** as it explores the censorship row that occurred during the 70s and 80s and which still raises its ugly head today mainstream and international release. In some cases we have only been able to see the full uncut editions of these classics in recently released DVD editions.

You would think that in the 21st century the government would believe adults would be mature enough to decide what they wish to watch in the privacy of their own homes, but not so. The Wowsers such as Fred Nile (as shown in the film) are still poking their noses into our privates and many of the observations by Barry Humphries on the then chief censor of Australian films could equally still apply today. Indeed, over the last few years the hand of censorship

has increased with many mainstream films being more sternly classified and scenes clipped and removed for ridiculous reason. It seems that those who control our government lack not only an artistic sense, but any sense of style or humour. When you read some of the reasons behind some of the censorship you begin to wonder why religious paternalism has any place in a secular multicultural democracy in the 21st century.



Not quite Hollywood reminds you of just how daring Australian film was in the 70s and 80s and also holds out hope for a return to such genre glory again, especially with the success of such films as **Wolf Creek**, **Saw** and **Rogue**.

The moment this fine documentary finished I began rummaging through the internet to look for DVD releases of these old classics. While sadly many could not be found, I was surprised how many I could find and will start my journey down memory lane tomorrow night !

While we reviewed the theatrical release of **Not Quite Hollywood** in 2008, the DVD release in 2009 has to be seen to be believed. It not only includes a superb high quality version of the documentary but lots more.

On the first disc we have a rip roaring commentary by director Mark Hartley. It is filled with all sorts of wicked tales and anecdotes which you will not hear anywhere else. There is also Quentin Tarantino and John Lamond explaining the significance of **Not Quite Hollywood** and by default Ozploitation to Australian cinema.

A Scene from Thirst





Alvin Purple brought sex to the Aussie screen like never before...

Tarantino seems to get unduly excited in both his introductions and in **Not Quite Hollywood** about Ozploitation cinema, he truly loves it !

On the second disc we have a great selection of trailers. One of the things I remember the most about Australian cult cinema in the Seventies and Eighties was the trailers. You would rent a video and as it ended you were hit with these amazing adverts for upcoming features.

They looked so amazing you ran to the video store to rent them, usually the best bits were in the trailers and sometimes they even had content which seemed totally unrelated to the film, but it didn't matter, it was all part of the fun. In the US trailer DVDs sell well, the **42nd Street** series of cult trailers are packed with smutty, strange, horror and cult films.

NQH Disc two does not disappoint either; it offers a superb range of Ozploitation trailers which are divided into various types.

Ockers, Knockers, Pubes and Tubes which features trailers for: **The Naked Bunyip, Stork, The Adventures of Barry McKenzie, Barry McKenzie Holds His Own, Alvin Purple, Alvin Rides Again, Peterson, The Love Epidemic, Eskimo Nell, Plugg, The Box, Eliza Frazer, Fantasm, Fantasm Comes Again, The ABC of Love and Sex, Felicity, Pacific Banana, Centrespread** and **Melvin, Son of Alvin.**

Comatose Killers and Outback Chillers features the trailers for: **Night of Fear, Inn of the Damned, Patrick, Long Weekend, Snapshot, Thirst, Harlequin, The Survivor, Dead Kids, Road Games, A Dangerous Summer, Next of**

Kin, Razorback and Bloodmoon.

High Octane Disasters and Kung Fu Masters features the trailers for: **Stone, The Man From Hong Kong, Mad Dog Morgan, Mad Max, Stunt Rock, Chain Reaction, Race for the Yankee Zephyr, Turkey Shoot, Midnite Spares, BMX Bandits, The Return of Captain Invincible, Frog Dreaming, Sky Pirates** and **Dead End Drive In.**

There are also trailers for other Madman releases: **Love the Beast, Ten Empty, The Man From Hong Kong, Dead End Drive In** and **Stunt Rock.**

These categories are also used for stills galleries which also include some very impressive poster art. There is a wonderful question and answer session from The Australian Centre for the Moving Image which features a panel discussion with Mark Hartley, Antony Ginnane, David Hannay, Richard Brennan, Brian Trenchard-Smith, Grant Page, Roger Ward and Everett D. Roche. There is also an overview of the career of Richard Franklin, who died in 2007 and an audio interview.

Quentin Tarantino pops up again this time in a meeting with Brian Trenchard Smith and then there are the deleted scenes !

This 2 DVD package receives the highest accolades for the very best presentation of a doco I have ever seen. **Not Quite Hollywood** has won awards around the world and is arguably the best documentary on a film genre ever made, it has been presented in a way which really does respect to the work that went into it and in a way that will entertain the viewer for hours and hours on end.



Eskimo Nell

The Chain Reaction
Umbrella
Entertainment
All Regions DVD

Adventure / Action
Thriller

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

The Chain reaction is classic Ozploitation cinema directed and written by Ian Barry and Produced by David Elfick with George Miller and Ross Matthews.

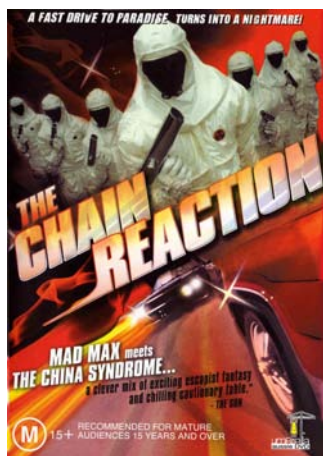
A massive radioactive water spill at WALDO, a nuclear waste disposal facility, contaminates a young scientist. The company running the facility tries to cover up the spill, but the scientist escapes and takes refuge with a young couple enjoying a dirty weekend in their mountain valley retreat.

As WALDO gradually closes in ruthlessly on the dying scientist, the couple become more deeply involved to the point that their lives are now also at risk. With only one way in and out of the valley, staying ahead of WALDO is difficult but necessary until they can get the word out of the impending ecological disaster.

This film is one of the "Ozploitation" series covered in **Not Quite Hollywood**. It was possibly intended as an alternative anti-nuclear protest film to **The China Syndrome** from the previous year, but with the addition of crowd-pleasing car chases and beautiful scenery. In the process it turned into more of a thriller than a protest movie.

The film nearly didn't make it. Ian Barry was way over budget, and George Miller, director of **Mad Max** from the year before, was called in to do the car chases and stunts. For this reason the film has more in common with **Mad Max**, including many of the actors. Even Mel Gibson makes a brief appearance as a mechanic. This is not, however, to put down Barry's work in any way. Russell Boyd's beautiful cinematography of the quiet rural valley and community is a stark contrast to the fierce action sequences, and the contrast heightens the drama of the story.

The film was definitely low-budget (\$450,000) and sometimes the film shows this. Footage of



the waste facility is poorly integrated, the plot is sometimes thin, and Steve Bisley's acting as the hero is often a bit rough. This is not so much due to his acting ability as to a plot that simply doesn't give him much room to develop.

The same can be said for the female lead, Arna-Maria Winchester. Even a couple of nude scenes can't make up for minimal character development. I guess this is just a symptom of a crippling budget. Possibly the best acting comes from Ross Thompson as Heinrich, the dying scientist.

Still, what the film lacks in polish is made up for by scenery, stunts and enthusiasm. In spite of its age, the film still works. Critically, even though the film is nearly thirty years old, the problems it raises are still with us. The film has been out of print for many years, so it's good to see it cleaned up and re-released by Umbrella. It may not be Australia's greatest film, but it's still a good watch.

The Chain Reaction is presented in Anamorphic Widescreen.

Howling III: The Marsupials
R4
Umbrella Entertainment

The Howling was a much celebrated Eighties werewolf film which combined excellent special effects (for the time) with an intelligent and challenging plot. Surprisingly it is still on the list of most watched werewolf films today. However, something very strange occurred between **The Howling** and **Howling III**. **Howling III** is rip roaring cult cinema and Ozploitation at its most cheesy. It has everything you would hope for in a B grade horror as well as mercilessly exploiting Australian cultural themes along the way.

The background to **Howling III** is that the Australian Aboriginals worship an animal spirit known as Emunen which is the magical essence of the Tasmanian Tiger. It seems the Tiger was not hunted for its fur, but because it had the ability to shape change. When the last Tiger died its spirit became the totem for a group of lycanthropes which had been born from the passionate union of a man and a female Tiger. There are many werewolf clans worldwide but the one in Australia is unique, just like a lot of Australian wildlife. They are marsupials and bring up their young in a pouch. A small clan of these lycanthropes have survived isolated in the country village of Flow, their patriarch is the unpredictable Thylo.

Jerboa is a young member of the clan and is sick of Thylo's sexual advances. She decides to run away and finds herself in Sydney, with no

money or food. Lucky for her, she is found by Donny, who not only falls instantly in love with her but offers her a lead in a horror film called "Shapeshifters". Yes, there is lot of irony, self deprecating and self referencing horror humour throughout the film and yes, most of it is pretty lame.



Donny and Jerboa get quickly down to business and made wild passionate love, animal style. However, while she is asleep he notices strange things about her anatomy including rather a lot of hair and what looks like an opening in her abdomen. Surprisingly he doesn't seem to care. Ahh ! That's love for you !

As Shapeshifters nears completion they hold a celebration party. While marsupial werewolves are not affected by the full moon, they are effected by flashing lights. The disco strobes at the party begin to trigger a transformation. To avoid killing her new found lover she runs into the night and straight into oncoming traffic, she is taken to a local hospital.

Cultural Aboriginal Werewolf Footage—I love the strange haircuts.



Of course, this is where the story becomes complicated. The hospital staff are not surprisingly rather confused by her anatomy and condition. Beckmayer has been researching werewolves for some years and had read the reports about the Russian Clan, he takes over the medical treatment of Jerboa. However, the military believe they are a threat and want her and her kind out of the way.

It seems that ever since the early 1900s the English and American governments on the advice of the Vatican have been working to exterminate all werewolves since they are satanic. They believed that the Australian marsupial werewolf (read Tasmanian Tiger) was extinct but now the threat has resurfaced.

When Jerboa is kidnapped by three werewolves dressed as nuns and taken back to Flow, the military are put on high alert. The werewolf clan and Jerboa are now at great risk, Beckmayer, her lover and the military are hot on their trail and a lot of blood will be shed.

This is Ozploitation cinema taken to the next level. The sheer political incorrectness of rewriting aboriginal dream time legends to include a werewolf cult is breathtaking and loads of fun !!

Probably the most celebrated scenes are the uniquely Aussie marsupial werewolf Jerboa giving birth. We get to see a little baby werewolf climb out of Jerboa's nether regions and crawl along her abdomen into her pouch. This is so truly bizarre it is astounding – a uniquely Australian werewolf cinematic experience ! The little lycanthrope continues to grow and looks so damn cute you just want to adopt one !

There is also a cold war tale involving a Russian

Marsupial Werewolf Baby !



Werewolf Nuns

werewolf clan (who are of a different sub genus and not marsupials) and Olga, a defector who has come to Australia to bring new blood to the Australian werewolf clan. Incidentally, the Aussie werewolf clan look very much like hippies and live in a broken down village protected by a local aboriginal werewolf who has a special link to the great Tasmanian Tiger spirit called Emu-nen!

This really is lots of fun. The special effects are cheesy and the plot is convoluted and bizarre – it seems to pack in every possible werewolf motif that could be written into it. The acting is pretty woeful, which is strange when you consider it stars literally everyone who was anyone in Australian cinema at the time from Barry Otto to Frank Thring and god knows how many others.

There are even cameo appearances by Barry Humphries as Dame Edna Everage and film reviewer Bill Collins.

Howling III is superb Ozploitation cinema. It is pure trash and takes the werewolf film to places it has never gone before or again !

It is one of the most unique and bizarre cult films ever made and will have you howling long into the night...with laughter !

Turkey Shoot is the epitome of Ozploitation cinema, directed by infamous director Brian Trenchard-Smith, it is a totally over the top cult classic.



It is generally seen as one of the first Australian films to attempt to tap into the success of the **Mad Max** films. With a strongly futuristic tone influenced by the post Apocalyptic science fiction of the period with lashings of the **Most Dangerous Game** (1932).

While these serious concepts may underlie the film and its portrayal of a totalitarian re-education camp has quite significant cinematic heritage, **Turkey Shoot** turns the whole genre into high camp with incredible over acting, extreme violence and political incorrectness.

It is 1995 and the way in which society deals with its non-conforming members is to send them to re-education camps. These work camps use a variety of methods, violent and otherwise, to break and reform their prisoners.

A small group of new prisoners arrive for rehabilitation. Chris Walters, who had the misfortune to protest against the violence she saw by the police, Rita Daniels, who is accused of prostitution and Paul Landers, a radical who ran a pirate radio station.

The camp itself is run by a group of spoilt upper class debauchees who seem to take pleasure in the sadistic torture of the prisoners. Each year “Thatcher”, the camps warden, offers the ultimate form of sporting entertainment for visiting officials, a turkey shoot. Each of the guests have their own weapons of choice and they choose a prisoner to hunt. Four prisoners are told that if they can evade their pursuers for 24 hours they will have their freedom, but nothing is quite as it seems as the truth is that the camp is on an Island and there is no escape !



Turkey Shoot was notorious at the time for its lashings of violence, rape, gore and brutality. It's bizarre characters only added to the strange mix ranging from a stereotypical lesbian sexual predator in Carmen Duncan to a sideshow freak who is the special friend of visiting hunter Tito. This is not to mention the prison guards who are as dumb as dogshit. It has some truly extreme moments including when Alf, Tito's offsider, breaks off and eats the toe of the prisoner they are hunting! It revels in excess and uses as much gratuitous sex and violence as it can pack into its approximate 90 minutes.

Turkey Shoot still polarizes its audience; David Stratton once described it as 'a catalogue of sickening horrors' while Quentin Tarantino continues to sing its praises. In 2008 it is considered one of the ultimate Ozploitation titles !

The edition from Umbrella is truly stunning, a 16 x 9 high quality print with some superb documentaries including "Blood and Thunder Memories" – memories from such Turkey Shoot survivors (!) as Michael Craig, Lynda Stoner and Roger Ward and "A Good Soldier" – a comprehensive interview with director Brian Trenchard-Smith.

Turkey Shoot is available as a single DVD and as part of the Umbrella Ozploitation Box Set.

Razorback Umbrella R4 Collectors Edition

Razorback is a surprisingly impressive monster film set in outback Australia with the cinematography of an art film and the plot of a cult exploitation classic.



Directed by Russell Mulcahy, who up until this time was mainly known for his music videos and later went on to direct **Highlander**, **Resident Evil Extinct** and even episodes of the English edition of **Queer as Folk**, it has a sense of style not normally seen in cult films.

At the time it was derided for having style over substance, but I think this as uncharitable. The reality is that many films use style as a way to tell a story – colour, shadow, imagery, symbols, sound – and a non linear approach to storytelling is common in Europe cinema particularly, Italian horror comes to mind.

Razorback has surprisingly impressive cinematography and is actually a rather moody and layered film, on DVD it is quite a visual feast. There are lots of memorable scenes, moody set pieces and even some nice dream sequences. There is a constant use of strange images ranging from crows to surreal night landscapes and symbolic images.

Certainly it is a strange amalgam of genres, it is *Jaws* in the outback with a giant pig (**Razorback**), a country inbred horror tale and meat eaters versus animal liberationists. It seems to mix an art film sensibility with a cult genre film approach and this combination is unusual to say the least, but that just makes it more unique and more of Ozploitation classic !!

The film is packed with stereotypes and caricatures which have a dark humour about them, they are so extreme, so over the top that they are both shocking and amusing. Petpak is just so utterly repulsive you cannot believe it and yet it works. Having seen **Razorback** a few times, I see something more every time I watch it; I would really categorize it as a dark fantasy since so many elements seem to be a mixture of reality and perverse fantasy. The soundtrack by Iva Davies of Icehouse is excellent and creates a great atmosphere. But, I should be honest,

there are some problems and that major one is the **Razorback** ! It must be the worst mechanical animal ever created ! It looks terrible and as you will hear in the documentary it was literally a giant stuffed pig on wheels which could hardly be moved !

In addition, certainly some of the acting also leaves a little to be desired, I found Jake Cullen as the haunted grandfather wanting to avenge the death of his grandchild a bit wooden and unconvincing, but the others were reasonable.

The storyline is bizarre yet captivating. Jack Cullen is looking after his grandchild and without much warning, his house is torn apart by a large pig like creature and explodes. It seems the pig has taken away the child for a late night snack ! Nobody believes his story and he is put on trial in a local court for murder. While he is acquitted he becomes a pariah and so he begins a vendetta against the **Razorback**. Cut to years later...

An American TV investigator comes to an outback town to document the killing of Kangaroos by Petpak to make cheap and nasty pet food. She obviously makes enemies pretty quickly and when she decides to make a night time clandestine visit to Petpak she has overstepped the mark. Two rather perverse brothers, Benny and Dicko decide to rough her up, indeed Dicko wants to take it much further, but before they can have their fun the **razorback** tears her and her car apart in a rather impressive and graphic scene.

Her husband travels to Australia to find his missing wife and the search for the pig begins...

The edition from Umbrella is a great 16.9 transfer and is beautifully clear with a 5.1 soundtrack. Having originally seen this on video on its first release, it is marvellous to see such a high quality print. It really shows off the cinematography and the soundtrack by Iva Davies sounds awesome in Dolby Digital 5.1

Umbrella has not scrimped on the extras either, this release includes some great extras including *Jaws on Trotters*, a seventy minute documentary, an audio interview with Gregory Harrison, deleted scenes, a stills and poster gallery and more..

While **Razorback** is available as a single DVD release, it is also included on the Ozploitation box sets released by Umbrella Entertainment.

**Patrick
R4 DVD
Umbrella
Entertainment
2009**

In room 15 of the mysterious Roget clinic is a young comatose patient named Patrick. His doctor (Robert Helpmann) thinks he's nothing more than 170 pounds of limp meat hanging off a comatose brain. However, a young nurse Kathy thinks that there is more to Patrick than meets the eye.

It seems that since Patrick has lost consciousness, he has compensated for the loss of his five senses by developing psychic powers including psychokinesis (the ability to move and influence things at a distance) and he begins to influence, perhaps even control, those around him.

His doctor performs unusual experiments on his patient desiring to locate the point at which death intervenes in the coma state. These experiments range from constant sensory tests to electro shock. Helpmann plays the role in a truly magnificent manner with venom and high camp, he is the doctor from hell.

The head nursing sister has been slowly decay-

Patrick and his constantly unnerving gaze !



Patrick's Doctor cops a blow !

ing at the Roget Clinic and is seemingly obsessed with the sex life of her nurses. She explains to Kathy, when she first arrives, that previous nurses have taken the job to explore their sexual perversions from rubbing themselves with faeces to necrophilia – it is surely one of the strangest job interviews ever seen on screen.

Patrick is in the clinic as he killed his parents in a state of Oedipal rage, he was jealous of his mother's relationship with her love so threw a heater into their bath in a rather dramatic scene. It seems he has regularly fallen for other nurses and strange things have happened to their partners.

He now falls in love with Kathy and nothing will stand in his way. His obsession turns to rage as she goes on dates and attempts to reconcile with her husband – everyone is now at risk from Patrick.

Made in 1978 **Patrick** was an immediate cult film success even though it seemed to be first appreciated internationally. Indeed it was released in Italy to rave success with a soundtrack by Goblin.

It was nominated for Best Film at the 1978 AFI Awards and was the winner of the Best Director prize at the prestigious Sitges Fantasy Film Festival in Spain. Patrick has continued to attract a large cult following for many years it is the perfect Ozploitation film.

It is one of the more innovative cult titles celebrated in the highly

successful 2008 documentary on Australian cult cinema "**Not Quite Hollywood**". It is packed with suspense, horror and some quite astounding shocks.

One of the things which made **Patrick** so successful was the look of the film. There are some truly unnerving set pieces which have entered the history of cinema as great horror film moments including the heater in the bath killing and the momentous climatic death leap Patrick makes from his bed.

A constant mood is created throughout the film by an eye for detail, emphasis is placed on Patrick's gaze and his unblinking eyes and this creates an eerie and uncomfortable feel.

There is also a nice reoccurring motif about electricity which, of course, has major consequences later when Patrick starts to use his skills in a more direct manner than just influencing those around him. The acting is superb if not eccentric, Helpmann as the deranged doctor in charger is superb as is the obsessive matron.

In many ways **Patrick** anticipated such later psychic thrillers as *Scanners* and is still a very successful cult horror film with a lot to offer. While many attempts were made to make knock off sequels (an Italian one comes to mind), nothing compares to the original.

While **Patrick** has been available on DVD in the past, this really is the definitive edition featuring a new high quality anamorphic transfer and a collection of exclusive special features including "A coffee break with Antony I. Ginnane" - an all-new featurette on the making of *Patrick*, a rare archival on-set interview with Director Richard Franklin, audio commentary with Director Richard Franklin, an excerpt from dubbed US version.

Other features include "The Man Who Wasn't There" - a PDF file of the unproduced *Patrick* sequel treatment, original Australian and US trailers, a stills and poster gallery, Ginnane trailer reel and more Umbrella Ozploitation trailers.

The Antony I. Ginnane trailer reel is great fun with trailers from some of his more unusual films such as **Survivor** and **Dead Kids**, many of these have not been released on DVD and so hopefully the trailers may be signs of things to come !

The Man from Hong Kong Madman Entertainment R4 DVD

The Man from Hong Kong is a superb example of exploitation cinema, it was a strange Seventies martial arts spectacular where absolutely everything was taken to an extreme.



The Man from Hong Kong was unusual in many ways; it was a co production between Golden Harvest and The Movie Company which was sponsored by the Australian Film Commission, a newly formed government body funding Aussie films. It stars Jimmy Wang Yu as a hard fighting and hard lovin' Hong Kong police operative and George Lazenby as the evil drug kingpin who also happens to be a martial arts expert.

Throughout the film are ludicrously long fight sequences, lots of bloody hand to hand combat, an incredible array of car crashes and some awesome hand gliding. It is literally packed with stunt work having employed some of the better known stuntmen from both Hong Kong and Australia including Grant Page, Corey Yuan and Yuen Biao.

The "Australianness" is a unique aspect of **The Man from Hong Kong** from the great shots of

Beaten but not down !





Fang gets some love action...

Sydney to the raucous humour. It is also filled with politically incorrect comments - certainly the Chinese jokes would prove rather insensitive in any film today.

The film opens with an amazing drug bust at what was then Ayers Rock (now called Uluru). Certainly today it is unlikely any stunt team would get permission to do a fight sequence up and down the sides of what is considered a sacred site ! It is a real beauty, filled with great visuals and superb action.

When Aussie cops can't get anything out of the courier, they call Inspector Fang of the Hong Kong Special Branch to escort him home.

However, Fang has other ideas and beats the hell out of the courier to find who his Australian contact is. When he learns that the drug kingpin is Jack Wilton (George Lazenby), a well known Sydney identity and seemingly untouchable criminal mastermind, he sets out to get his man.

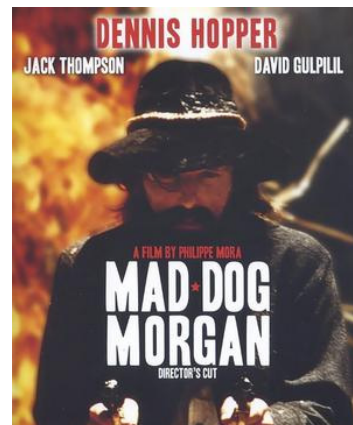
As he attempts to get to Wilton the body count increases as Wilton attempts to get Fang out of the way and Fang works his way through Wilton's men. The final showdown is superbly over the top and what could have simply been a "bad James Bond clone" film is elevated to a real cult classic.

There is so much in this film which is quirky and eccentric, from the constantly exaggerated fight scenes (both the martial arts school scene and the climactic scene between Wilton and Fang come to mind) to the truly amazing car chase sequence – just how many cars did they crash and burn ?

Extras include the rare Brian Trenchard-Smith films **Kung Fu Killers** and **Hospital's Don't Burn !**

Mad Dog Morgan R4 DVD Umbrella Entertainment

Mad Dog Morgan is a truly impressive piece of Australian cinema, starring just about everybody who was anybody in the Australian film industry of the time from Jack Thompson, Frank Thring, Michael Pate, Graeme Blundell and Bill Hunter to David Gulpilil. In addition it stars the truly eccentric and bizarre Dennis Hopper.



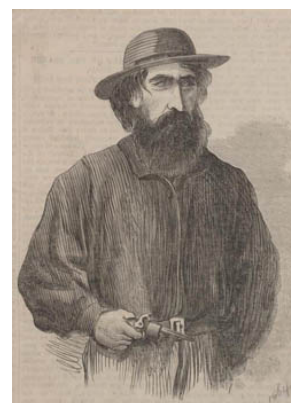
It is a quirky film based on the true story of Irish outlaw Dan Morgan and yet presented in a way that is truly sympathetic to the outlaw way of life and the conditions that forced many people to live beyond the law.

Mad Dog Morgan is set in the harsh landscape of Australia in the 1850s. Daniel Morgan has come from Ireland to try and seek his fortune in a land very different from his own. He works the goldfields and tries to make a living and yet witnesses a police snitch set up those around who work without licenses, rather than persecuting them the police simply kill them in cold blood without a second thought. Morgan escapes, yet his hatred of authority has now reached breaking point.

He takes to a life of crime but is caught on his first highway robbery and sentenced to 12 years of hard labour. As the Judge remarks to a friend, he gives harsh sentences as more roads need to be made, there seems to be little justice in early Australia.

During the first period of his sentence he is branded, beaten and sodomized and then forced into hard labour breaking stones.

Morgan bides his time and on release plans his revenge. He steals a horse yet is shot in the shoulder. Luckily, he meets a local aboriginal



The Historical Mad Dog Morgan



Dennis Hopper as Mad Dog Morgan

called Billy who heals his wounds and becomes his constant companion.

Together they work to exact Morgan's revenge and along the way right the wrongs of workers underpaid and mistreated. The scene in the film where Morgan forces a landowner to pay his workers extra cash payments is based on fact. Indeed, much of the film is based on solid historical research.

This is an unusual film, at times it has nearly art film like sequences (such as when Morgan is practising to become a bushranger), at other times it has scenes of great cinematic beauty showing the Australian landscape and aboriginal dances and customs. Indeed, the sheer number of locations, buildings and re-creations used in the film are astounding.

The friendship between Morgan and Billy is endearing and at time seems almost homo-erotic, the depth of feeling displayed between them is palpable. At the same time Morgan's mood changes and drinking are truly frightening. Dennis Hopper as Morgan is an inspired choice, well known for his drug and drinking problems interviews about the film make it clear Hopper was regularly smashed on set and yet just seems to add to the authenticity of the character !

Many of the characters in the film are superbly overdone such as Frank Thring as the deliriously nasty Victorian Police Superintendent Cobham who wants to keep Morgan's scrotum as a tobacco pouch. It is as though there is a deliberate attempt to play certain roles over the top to create a mood of "caricature" which ridicules the authorities of the period.

Mad Dog Morgan is certainly an unusual film, it is hard to put it into a single genre – it is at times

exploitation cinema with deliberately over the top characters, at other times a beautifully done period piece. Sometimes it plays like a "Robin Hood" outlaw movie, other times like a character study of those pushed beyond the brink by a vicious and callous legal system.

However, we define Mad Dog Morgan, it is a very significant film.

Deathcheaters R4 DVD Madman Entertainment

Brian Trenchard Smith is a name to conjure with; he made many of the great cult films which have become the backbone of Australian Cult or what is known as ozploitation cinema.



Deathcheaters is not one of his better efforts yet falls into the category of being so damn bad it ends up being good. It opens with a disco theme song which is played at various times throughout the film, enough that it gets into your head. But that is not the worst of it, **Deathcheaters** also features a soundtrack which, to be honest, is truly woeful, at times it sounds like the same riff played over and over again. It is a B grade extravaganza and is a unique cult film experience.

The storyline is slight and primarily set up to showcase a wide range of stunts many of which are utterly extraneous and have no value at all within the story, but what the hell, they look great ! More of these are featured in the second feature packed with **Deathcheaters – Danger Freaks** which includes 100 stunts in 90 minutes.

Steve (John Hargreaves) and Rod (Grant Page) are two Australian stuntmen; they have worked together since running special ops in Vietnam and run a company with the very Aussie name of "Cunning Stunts". The film opens as they are working on a commercial on an unnamed beach and after seeing a robbery intervene to save the day.

After various over the top car chases as well as stealing a leg of lamb from a butcher to smash



a car window and scaling down the edge of a tall skyscraper to get air into a bank vault, they return home pleased to have helped the police and the police seem to like their help. What are these guys ? Stuntmen come superheros ?

However, all is not as it seems, these events were all staged to see if they still have what it takes and when they pass with flying colours they are hired by government agent Culpepper (Noel Ferrier) to infiltrate a power plant in the Philippines to steal some highly significant papers.

It seems that the Australian government cannot be seen to be interfering in a foreign country's business (even if asked) and hence decide to hire two stuntmen come Vietnam Vets to undertake the task !

This is truly farcical stuff with terrible acting, constant and unnecessary stunts, Vietnam War flashbacks and truly embarrassing attempts at humour, ranging from attempts at slapstick to inane jokes.

It also features some of the worst clothes and interior design even seen in a film ! When they get down to business and raid the Filipino plant,

they use smoke bombs to avoid killing anyone – never mind that the site has over 150 security guards and of course get away via a hang-glider, something Trenchard-Smith seems obsessed with !

Deathcheaters is a typical ozploitation cult cinema, fuelled by a silly script and packed with lots of action but not much depth. It was bad in 1976 but now with the passing of time has achieved "classic status" due to its truly ridiculous storyline. Madman has released it in a brand new 16:9 transfer and I must say it looks and sounds great. It is also coupled with **Danger Freaks** – Trenchard-Smith's stunt doco.

If you like stunts, then this 2 DVD pack will keep you entertained for quite a while...

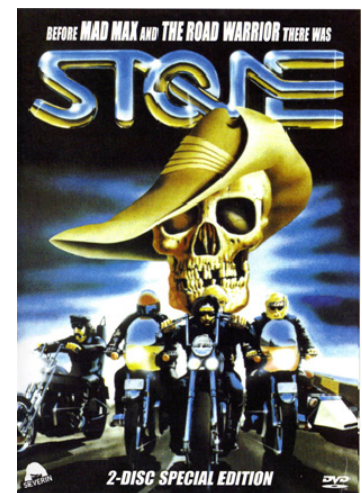
Stone
2-Disc Special Edition
 Produced and Directed by Sandy Harbutt
 Distributed by Severin Films
 R2 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Stone was one of the films that marked the return of Australia's film industry after World War II. Produced on a miniscule budget, it nevertheless became a cult Australian classic because of its realistic action and rather sympathetic portrayal of bikers. With the recent revival in interest in Australian films thanks to **Not Quite Hollywood** Severin's rerelease of **Stone** is quite timely. They have also included a lot of historical material that helps explain why the film has achieved its cult status.

The story is fairly straightforward. Members of the Grave Diggers motorbike gang are being killed one by one. The club would like to know who is responsible. So would the police. Stone (Played by Ken Shorter) manages to join the club, although barely tolerated.

He gradually forms a grudging respect for the bikers and their ideals.



In a post-Vietnam War society there is little room for rebels, yet the bikers' lifestyle makes them one of the few truly free groups left. University-educated Stone is rather out of place, but he gradually earns the respect of the bikers as they move towards finding out who the killer is.

The film is notable for its action scenes. It is hard to fake high speed riding on a bike, so the riding and accidents are spectacular and spontaneous-looking.



Bikies in battle mode...

Members of the Sydney Hells Angels chapter made up the numbers of the gang, and their easy style on a bike gives the film an authentic look.

Unfortunately it also raised the ire of a number of local citizens who felt that bikers were evil and not a suitable subject for a film. The full-frontal nudity and brutal fight scenes did nothing to help, either.

Many of the actors already had film or TV experience, so Sandy Harbutt was able to craft a surprisingly good film considering his small budget. Some of the characters are unforgettable, including Harbutt himself as the head of the gang.

Many of the actors got back on their bikes and appeared later in **Mad Max**. Hugh Keays-Byrne turns in a good performance in *Stone*, and it is not surprising that he was picked for the role of the menacing leader of the bikie gang in **Mad Max**.

Classic funeral procession from Stone



One who did not return to films was Sandy Harbutt. At this time the Australian Film Development Board, who had supported the film, was replaced by the Australian Film Commission. This body felt that bikie movies did nothing for Australia's image and they did their best not to promote it at overseas film festivals. They preferred instead beautiful, artistic, incredibly boring films like **Picnic At Hanging Rock** or great sweeping historical dramas. Finally Harbutt took matters into his own hands and arranged his own promotions and achieved some international sales. Although the AFC got their money back with interest, they appear to have blacklisted Harbutt. He never made another film.

The extras DVD included in this set has an excellent documentary on the Stone phenomenon and its history, and much commentary by Harbutt on the problems of making the film. It also includes interviews, a Director's slideshow, the documentary *The Making of Stone*, and others. The Extras disk is almost as good as the film itself.

In 1998 a twenty fifth **Stone** anniversary celebration was attended by 35,000 bikers, showing just how much status this film has achieved. If you are Australian, the film is important because of its place in the country's cinema history. If you are not, it is a worthwhile alternative to the traditional bikie movie style. In either case it is a really good watch and will impress you with its quality. For a film made 35 years ago it has aged well.

Stunt Rock
Madman
Entertainment
R4 DVD

Stunt Rock is another exploitation classic from Brian Trenchard Smith.

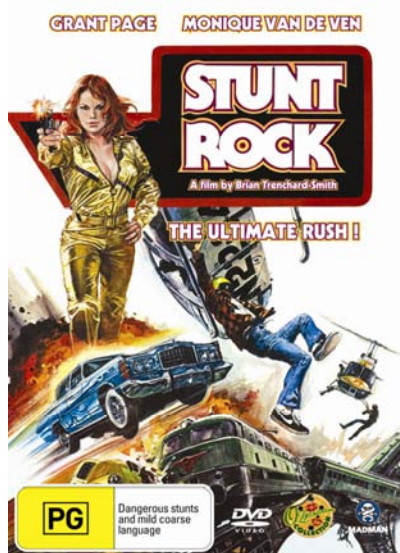
It seems that Smith developed quite a liking for his stuntman Grant Page and decided to use him as the nexus of many of his B grade films. Obviously it is a cheap way to make cult films if you can combine your stuntman with your lead actor and use old footage and interviews along the way !

Starting with **Deathcheaters**, Page was turned from stuntman into actor, which proved difficult as he really couldn't act even if his life depending on it ! In **Stunt Rock** Trenchard Smith pulls every trick in the book, he creates a minimal plot and packs it with all manner of stock footage and every conceivable stunt created by Page, even including a couple where Page was injured! Ahh, the joys to exploitation cinema.

The plot, as it is, centres on Grant Page travelling from Australia to Los Angeles to complete a series of stunts for a television series. His first stunt, a car accident, lands him in hospital but against his doctors orders he leaves the hospital (rather unofficially, out of a fifth story window) and gets back to work.

As he performs his stunts, he makes friends

The truly horrific music of Sorcery !



with the star of the series and with Lois Wells, a newspaper report trying to understand his craft. She provides the possible romantic interest to add some pizzazz to the plot.

Along the way he meets the glam rock band Sorcery through a friend and this allows Smith to show an inordinate amount of their live show to help fill out the 90 minutes of the film.

The film really is padded out with a ridiculous amount of stock footage showing stunts by Page from such films as **Mad Dog Morgan**, **The Man from Hong Kong** and **Gone in Sixty Seconds**. These are shown at every opportunity and related to the script by minimal links, occasionally they are edited with split screens and other innovations to make them seem creative !

There is even a segment showing the history of stunt work and some interviews and pep talks by Page on stunt work. While these are vaguely interesting, it shows just how disorganized the plot truly is, it meanders all over the place and seems to have no idea at all what the film is actually about or where it is going.

To make sure it doesn't end up looking too much like a documentary (and it certainly seems to head in that direction) Smith adds the little known Seventies glam rock band Sorcery into the mix. They are typical glam rockers with a penchant for occult themes and magic stage antics, the one thing they seem to have trouble doing is singing—they seem to scream and wail and be constantly off key.

Their songs really are terrible (their classic number woman seems to have all of five words in the whole song) and their stage antics in which a wizard does battle with the devil are painfully amateur even for the glam rock era.

The combination of stunts, glam rock, bad acting, more stunts, stock footage and a plot which is nonexistent makes this an unbeatable work of cult cinema.

Silly, inane and yet brimming with action, this is Ozploitation cinema at its most ridiculous.

This is a superb release from Madman Entertainment and also includes the film **The Stuntmen** by Brian Trenchard Smith.

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Dying Breed

Dying Breed
R4 DVD
Sony Entertainment

Ozploitation cinema is something which is ever so unique and exciting; indeed it is my favourite type of film. Combining exploitation and unique Australian content it offers something which stands out from other genres of cult entertainment. Generally, Ozploitation cinema has been a thing of the past with films primarily made during the Seventies and Eighties and yet with the appearance of **Dying Breed** a fresh breath of air has been breathed into an old genre.

Dying Breed brings together so many traditional exploitation themes from cannibalism to inbreeding, human meat pies to mantraps, a perverse twist on Australian history to supposedly extinct Tasmanian Tigers.



The film
o p e n s
with a
horrific
retelling

of the end of the life of Alexander Peirce, the Pieman. He was a real character from Australian history who was so degraded and mistreated by the authorities that he turned to cannibalism to survive on escape. As an Irishman he had a seething hatred for the English who ran the penal settlements and did everything he could to get out. He was the only prisoner to escape Sarah Island and survive.

He convinced seven convicts to go with him and when he arrived on the other side of Tasmania was the only one left. He had eaten the others during the journey and has their remains in his pockets.

As he is hunted down by the British, he reaches the edge of a cliff and faces off against a British officer, as he bites out the officers throat, he sees the elusive Tasmanian tiger and then falls to his death. However, that is not the end of Pierce, it seems he has fathered many children and his descendants live isolated in the village of Sarah to this day.

We then cut to the present and Nina is on the way to Tasmania with her boyfriend Matt, totally obnoxious city boy Jack and his girlfriend Rebecca. Nina's sister went missing in Tasmania some eight years and was later found drowned.

However, she left a tantalizing clue, a record of what looks like a fresh Tasmanian tiger print. Nina wants to complete her sister's work and find the elusive tiger. A million bucks on offer also offers encouragement !



Jack is such an arse you wish he was killed earlier !

Nina also has some nagging doubts about her sister's death and these are exacerbated by strange visions of her sister being raped and tortured. There are also reports of numerous missing tourists from the same region. So off they go following in her footsteps.

Soon they reach the last known place where Nina's sister stayed, a small isolated township called "Sarah". The village seems like a place out of time, obsessively devoted to its Irish heritage and to the "Pieman" – indeed their speciality is their meat pies which are celebrated throughout the region !

The locals seem like a very strange bunch, friendly yet with hostility just under the surface. They are more than a bit like Jack, who seems to want to start fights with everyone and he soon has a major run-in with a local. Things are not off to a good start.

The comparison between the local rednecks and the city folk is played out throughout the film, especially in regards to Jack. The descendants of Alexander Pierce may be violent cannibals, but that is in their breeding. Jack is just plain violent, narcissistic and obnoxious with no excuse for the way he behaves.

As they head out into the landscape, and it is certainly superb looking countryside, they find they are not just hunting the Tiger but they are being hunted as well.

The hunting motif is nicely explored throughout the film. Pierce hunted by the British, the Tiger hunted to extinction (well, perhaps), Jack hunting local animals and the city dwellers hunted by the redneck

cannibalistic Tassie folk.

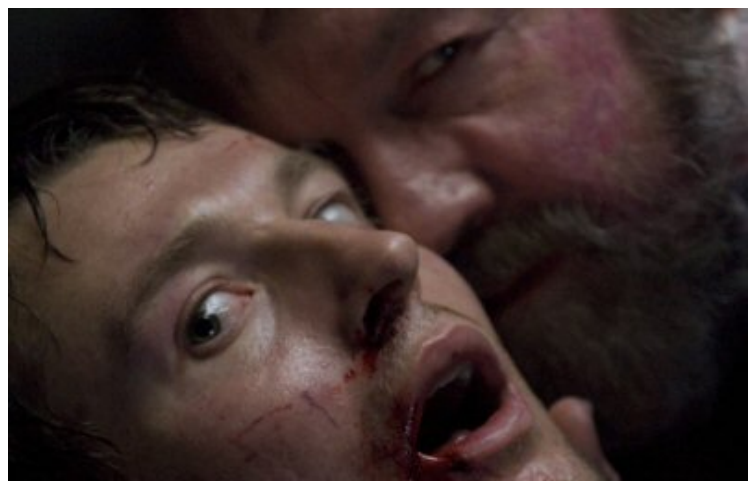
Another re-occurring theme is falling from the cliff into the ravine. We see this at the start of the film with Alexander Pierce, then with Nina's sister and the fall motif is continued later but transposed onto a bridge. I find these various motifs encoded into the film gives it a coherence which makes it a very superior cult horror film experience which has obviously been created from a carefully crafted plot.

The acting is professional, the look of the film convincing and the photography of the Tasmanian landscape is quite stunning. The juxtaposition of the brutality of both city and country folk and the sheer beauty of the landscape comes through clearly. I found it quite poignant to see Nina sitting quietly watching a rabbit and Jack suddenly shooting a cross bow bolt through it for dinner.

The torture and bloodshed is at a pretty high level and very well done. It will certainly have you cringing but in my mind the violence is not gratuitous and fits well within the context of the film.

It would be easy to see this film as being filled with stereotypes and caricatures, yet this would be a superficial reading. Good exploitation and horror cinema takes well used themes and brings new life to them and this is what **Dying Breed** does. It takes the sort of inbred horror of films such as **The Hills Have Eyes**, creature feature stories and a unique take on the cannibal tale to make a very memorable and bloody horror film. All this and a good Aussie twist as well – what more could you ask for !

Matt thinks he has escaped, but things are not what they seem...





SNUFF YOU !

Cult Documentaries: From Snuff to Shockumentaries

The definition of a Snuff film is one in which the real death of a person or persons is depicted without the use of special effects for the purpose of entertainment and distribution to the public. The term itself was first used by Ed Sanders in 1971 in his highly inflammatory book on Charles Manson and the Family called "The Family". He alleged, among many other things, that the Manson family had created Snuff films, no such films were ever found but the sheer terror of the Manson family was enough to cause a Urban legend to begin. The Snuff film became the stuff of Urban legend, nearly every policeman had "heard of one" and rumours abound about that "unique film" which really shows someone being killed flourished.

The reality is far more mundane, the truth is that killing on film just doesn't look that good. Documentaries such as "**Mythbusters**" have shown how even simple car crashes need to be faked to make them more "cinema realistic". Cars generally do not explode every time they hit a tree or fall off a cliff, indeed the Mythbuster team had to pack the car with explosives both in the front seat and inside the engine to get the desired effect ! It is much the same with bodies, death is not glamorous.

This is not to say individual killers have not videotaped their murders for their own amusement, probably the best known case is from the early 1980s when Charles Ng and Leonard Lake videotaped the torture, rape and mutilation of various women. But these tapes were never made for distribution, they were created so individual psychopaths could use them as triggers to relive violent memories. In the documentary "**Snuff**" there is also a case where it was believed a killer produced videos "on demand" for select clients of torture, rape and murder, again, however, these are for individual consumption and do not really fit the definition of Snuff. The bottom line with Snuff films is

that they are probably the stuff of Urban legend alone. However soon, of course, the film industry found the concept a marketable commodity and "fake Snuff films" hit the shelves.

It is generally believed that the first fake Snuff film was called **Snuff** and dates from around 1976. It was a low budget horror film focused on a murderous cult (obviously framed about Charles Manson and the Family). The original film had been called **Slaughter** and was made by Michael Findlay and Roberta Findlay in Argentina in 1971, it had no success and sunk without a trace until 1976. Allan Shackleton, an enterprising film distributor decided that with the furore about Snuff films, he could re-edit the original film with extra footage to make it look like the producers of the film had killed someone during its making.



Roberta and Michael Findlay were furious and sued for damages, Shackleton made an out of court settlement. The film, however, became infamous, protests were held around the US and it sold out wherever it was shown.

Snuff TV that rots the mind in Videodrome



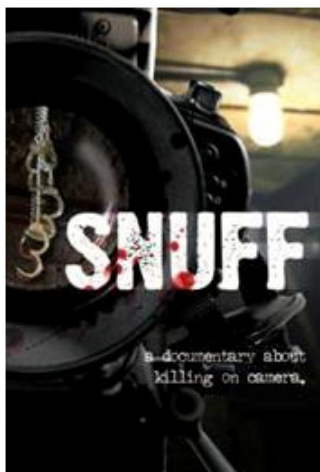
It is generally a very poorly made film and the supposed killing at the end is obviously faked, but since everyone wanted to believe it was real, it made a fortune.

Lots of other films followed in its wake either using Snuff as a theme (such as **Hardcore** (1979), **Videodrome** (1983) and many others) or creating fake Snuff torture films. In this second category we have such titles as the infamous Japanese **Guinea Pig** series of the 1980s and we could also add such films as the various titles by Nick Palumbo of Toe Tags films as **Murder Set Pieces**.

Today with the prevalence of so called "torture porn" within the mainstream of cinema, the legend of Snuff has pretty well dissipated into myth – films such as **Saw** and **Hostel** have really taken over where the fake Snuff films left off. It also proves the point that the illusion of film, even in death, looks so much better than real life !

Snuff: A film about Killing on Camera Killing Joke Films (2008)

Snuff: A film about Killing on Camera is a fascinating and clever examination of killing on film, it offers some of the best "critical thinking" about violence on film I have seen in a documentary.



It begins by exploring the traditional rumours of "Snuff Films", films which are supposedly made of real killings to be sold in the market for profit. It explores the various stories about such films including the propaganda use of their supposed existence by both feminists and the far right. It shows how these rumours primarily evolved from early horror films but that even after 20 years of FBI research, no such films have actually found to be in existence.

Classic examples of supposed snuff films which end up being proved to be fakes include the infamous 1976 film "**Snuff**" which was originally called "**Slaughter**" but which to tap into urban rumours about Snuff films had a new ending tacked on and its title changed. It caused instant controversy as the unthinking public and media

went into a frenzy believing it to be real. Other similar films included **Cannibal Holocaust** which tapped into both the public disgust and fascination with supposed Snuff films. Also covered are such "pseudo" shockumentaries as **Faces of Death** which mixed news footage with faked set pieces and which, it was rumoured, made more profit than Star Wars ! Snuff also discusses the way in which "fake" violence within a horror film can provide a safe environment to explore forbidden and taboo subjects within a narrative and hence offer a cathartic experience.

At the same time **Snuff: A film about Killing on Camera** is not just about supposed "Snuff" films. What makes it most interesting (and challenging) is that it extends the debate to examine the whole issue about killing on film. This is where the documentary becomes confronting and truly thought provoking. It seems to me it is too easy to denounce violence within cinema (i.e. fictional film) as a way of diverting attention from the inherent violence which occurs in real life and ends up being presented as a media product. So while our governments (especially Australian) censor violent and extreme cinema, at the same time we are bombarded with violent images in the news and desensitized by images of crime and war when it suits their purposes, whether it be for increased social control or justification of a military strategy.

After Snuff examines the issues of violence in cinema and film and demolishes the myths and legends, it then begins to explore the real issues and these are far more uncomfortable.

In Mark's story (sections one and two) Snuff explores real films made for collectors as an extension of the child exploitation industry. These are made "to order" by private collectors (many in the West) and involve the torture, mutilation and at times, killing of children. The evidence presented is persuasive and shocking and based on UK intelligence agency research. This is a significant section as it presents the reality rather than the fiction, rather than supposed mass market product (where bluntly special effects would make a death look more "real" than a "real" death), we have depraved individuals paying for a product just because it shows a real death.

Snuff then continues this exploration into the world of serial killers who use videotape to record their acts of violence. Including interviews with experts and detectives, Snuff explores the

the pathology of such events and how again these tapes are not made for "commercial" gain but for the personal and obviously disturbed motives of the individuals involved as part of their "patterned" obsessive behaviour. This is a powerful section and includes carefully edited footage from key cases.



The exploration of war, news and killing on film is one of the most interesting sections of the whole documentary. It examines the way in which war footage is used so pervasively in the media that it actually desensitizes us to the inherent violent nature of war.

In the case of Iraq, it has the opposite effect to how we would traditionally understand snuff, it desensitizes the viewer to such an extent that the killing becomes common place and insignificant. The news shows these distant shots of supposed targeted killings where a bomb is dropped and the target vanishes as through there is no killing involved. Somehow there is a difference between the one on one slaughter of an individual during a battle and the targeting of an individual using a bomb, yet the result is the same.

Our perceptions are manipulated, we see the killing as observers, detached and unaffected, we see violent killings and yet somehow these are acceptable because they are news, documentaries and media. This section offers some fascinating observations but be warned it also includes some of the footage being discussed so be prepared for a shock.

Snuff: a film about killing on camera is controversial and challenging. It deliberately takes the traditional debate about snuff films and uses it as a jumping off point to explore issues relating to the role of killing in the media especially in relation to crime and war. By doing so it discusses highly significant issues about killing and violence on camera in an informative and thought provoking manner.

Killing Joke Films

Web: <http://www.killingjokefilms.com/snuff.html>

Shockumentaries

Tied closely to the Snuff film is the concept of the Shockumentary. The Shockumentary also sometimes called a "Mondo film" is a documentary depicting sensational topics, scenes, and situations. These tend to have a focus on "extreme" subjects such as sex and death, but not always. Most Shockumentaries use a variety of footage including real and faked to create the sensational effect required.

It is generally agreed that the genre began with the outrageous Italian film **Mondo Cane** (A Dog's World) made in 1962 by Paolo Cavara, Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi. It covered all manner of subjects from sex to death, strange customs to animal cruelty and shocked, stunned and amused audiences worldwide.

Mondo Cane was followed by **Mondo Cane 2**, **Women of the World**, **Africa Addio** and **Goodbye Uncle Tom**. These films were all made to exploit the diversity of customs worldwide and shock Westerners who had little knowledge or experience of a world outside their own experience. They were a box office bonanza.

Shockumentaries tended to coalesce into set sub genres. On one hand you had the general "Mondo" film (such as the various Mondo Cane films), these covered all sorts of cultural weirdness and were marked by sarcastic commentaries and a sense of black humour. The Shocking Asia films could also be placed in this category. They were marked by the use of the "strangeness" of other cultures to shock their audiences.

On the other hand you had "sex" films such as **Mondo Topless** by Russ Meyer and **Sweden Heaven and Hell** which used the pseudo

Self Immolation in Mondo Cane





Dr.Gross from Faces of Death

documentary style to get as much sex on screen as possible under the guide of legitimate education !

The third category were the death Shockumentaries, while there was always death in the early Mondo films, it was always only a small part of the whole film. However, soon, a specific form of Mondo film developed focused purely on death.

The first major film in this category was **Faces of Death** (1978). **Faces of Death** was originally released into the Japanese market and slowly seeped into the Western market by black market video tape. Of course, this fed the desire for the film and it was an instant success. Faces of Death is a mixture of faked and real footage, it is estimated around 40-50% of the scenes have been faked (at a minimum). It has a certainly "exploitation" film feel, even with the opening scene featuring a Dr.Gross who comes across as a very unlikely clinician! Faces of Death is one of the most successful cult films of all times and was followed by a range of follow up titles—**Faces of Death 1-6, The Best and Worst of Faces of Death** and **Faces of Death: Fact or Fiction?**

While certainly shocking, so much of it seems so obviously faked that it is certainly more entertaining than that offensive.

Many films followed **Faces of Death** which lacked the ability to balance shock with humour, fake footage with real footage and these are much more difficult to stomach. Examples include the **Death Scenes** Series and the **Killing of America**.

It is interesting to see how the face of death has changed on film as time has progressed. The supposed Snuff film has nearly vanished from the world of urban legend replaced with "mainstream" torture porn and extreme horror, while the Shockumentary has had to change to compete with the sheer brutality of the everyday news.

While early Shockumentaries such as **Mondo Cane** etc had a sense of play and humour, as time has progressed new generations of films have focused more on real killings in an attempt to compete with real life and to keep the public keep buying their products.

The problem, of course, with this is that real death on film doesn't necessarily look that real, so none of the modern crop of films such as **Traces of Death** compares to the original Mondo releases and so, slowly, the Shockumentary and Mondo genre has slipped into the background and mainstream extreme and cult horror, which makes early fake Snuff films look tame, have taken centre stage.

Mondo Cane Collection - Limited Edition
Blue Underground
Mondo Cane
Mondo Cane 2
Women of the World
Africa Addio - English Version
Africa Addio - Directors' Cut
Goodbye Uncle Tom - English Version
Addio Zio Tom - Director's Cut
The Godfathers of Mondo
Boxed Set
R1 DVD
(Singles DVDs also available)

Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi are widely considered to be the creators of the "Mondo genre." What is Mondo ? It could be best described as exploitation cinema meets documentary, it is usually cynical, made with a jaundiced view of humanity and accompanied by a rather acerbic social commentary. At the same time it is always a powerful experience. Another expressive term may be "Shockumentary" and indeed **Mondo Cane** gave birth to a flood of imitators ranging from **Faces of Death** to **Shocking Asia I and II** and **Savage Man, Savage Beast**.

This collection brought together by Blue Underground includes five of the pair's most controversial films in an eight-disc set.

Two of the films are included in the edited English editions and for the first time in the West, fully uncut editions with subtitles. These are rare films, cut, edited and butchered wherever and whenever they were released, we can now see them all in their uncensored glory.



Journalist-turned-director Jacopetti and former naturalist Prosperi first teamed for 1962's **Mondo Cane** (A Dog's Life), which explored strange and exotic customs from around the world. The film struck a careful balance between humour and horror, constantly balancing scenes for emotional impact and effect. Wealthy pet owners in Pasadena bury their beloved and pampered pets in yuppie graveyards, while tribespeople in Taipei braise puppies for a Sunday supper!

While meeting with public acclaim, it was derided by the critics as vulgar and perhaps pornographic and banned in many countries. It seemed to shock and amaze in equal amounts and became an instant controversial success.

The careful use of editing, a emotionally manipulative score and the "roller coaster" ride from horror to joy, gore to sex seemed to work well with its fans. The film achieved even more success when its musical theme was turned into the pop song "More," which became a global smash hit that was even nominated for an Oscar!

Enough footage was shot during the making of **Mondo Cane** to allow for a sequel (**Mondo Cane II** or **Mondo Pazzo**) in 1963. This surpassed the first with some extremely powerful images especially those of slave markets in Africa and captured slave traders and the torture devices they used to deform beggar children so they could bring in more money. Certainly there is a strong polemic in the series which sympathizes with the oppressed and despises the rich and powerful, the question always arises however, of how much of this was truly felt and how much was motivated by possible box office success due to the cultural leftism of the period.

Another question is how much of the footage is

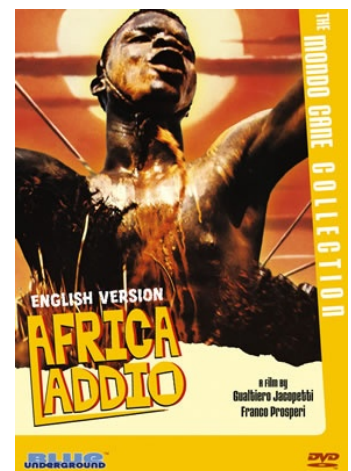
real and what is staged or manipulated. In the accompanying documentary Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi admit that **Mondo Cane II** contains "invented" footage including the scene where the Buddhist monk sets himself on fire, which they advise was a special effect clip sold to them by another filmmaker.

Mondo Cane II was followed by **Women of the World**, which explored women's roles around the globe. It was narrated by Peter Ustinov and is considered the weakest of all the Mondo series.

Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi decided to try something different and traveled to Africa during the period when various European imperial powers were granting independence and withdrawing from the continent. What they produced was even more controversial than their earlier films, accused of racism by critics, they offered a brutal and unflinching portrait of a continent gone mad with a strong inference that Britain and France have a lot to answer for and that their exit was ill conceived and unplanned and directly led to the devastation of the countries and people they had previously exploited.

"Africa Addio"

reveals in grisly detail the crimes committed by indigenous Africans against the remaining white settlers and the local wildlife. Large segments of the film show poachers brutally killing animals in the parks set up by Europeans. But this is just the beginning, the film then explores the civil wars that broke out across the continent as the infrastructure of this region fail.



In many ways **Goodbye Uncle Tom** ("Addio Zio Tom") is an attempt to balance the perceived racism in "Africa Addio". It was filmed as a sort of historical re-creation where the filmmakers are transported back in time and visit the American South during the slave era. This is truly shocking stuff.

Every scene is a horrific recreation of such

abhorrent activities as the breeding of slaves, the pseudo science of racism, hunting down and killing escaped slaves, slave ships, slave markets, and so on. The filmmakers based their film on written records and accounts of slave life, it is hard going and in some ways moves beyond the Mondo category. It is shocking and confronting yet of quite some significance as a documentary.

The Godfathers of Mondo is a specially made documentary by David Gregory on the films of Jacopetti & Prosperi featuring explosive interviews, never-before-seen footage, and much more. There are lots of other nice extras too !

The picture quality on all of these films is quite astounding, especially considering the age and content, it is literally crystal clear with intense colors and perfect tone, the soundtrack is powerful and mood creating.

This is an amazing collection. Blue Underground has this set listed as out of production but has released smaller three DVD sets as individual Shockumentary sets.

If you would like this original collection and it is a beauty, it is now only available on the second hand market for around \$100 US.

Blue Underground has recently released some of the titles from this series as individual DVDS and in combination sets.

Sweden Heaven and Hell Luigi Scattini KlubSuper8

During the 1960's cinema explored many new directions, one of the more unusual was that of the Mondo film. Mondo films were pseudo documentaries which focused on extreme, unusual and bizarre situations and usually mixed staged scenes with real footage (the word Mondo means world).

In many ways these films evolved from the early "health" film genre where scenes of a sexual nature could be shown as they are justified as educational, these early films ranged from Venereal Disease education titles to those on teen-



Supposed Sex Ed in Mondo Sex Films !

age rape, abortion and underage sex and always attracted a large audience. As "health" films became less successful with the advent of more lax censorship laws during the Sixties, the Mondo documentary was born.

The genre achieved worldwide prominence with the release of the wild **Mondo Cane** (it's a dog's world) and the films that followed it. In a strange way Mondo films were an attempt to deal with the new world that was opening up during the period. As communication became global and immigration increased, customs and lifestyles from other cultures were brought to the attention of the west and the Mondo film explored these, albeit with a condescending tone and a dose of exploitation.

Sweden Heaven and Hell was made at the height of the Mondo fad by Luigi Scattini, it was filmed in Sweden but without permission or appearance releases and was certainly not well received. It is a classic exploitation film but with a tone which is far more critical and condescending than even found in the **Mondo Cane** series; at times it borders on being anti-Swedish and constantly seems to lambast the Swedish for their open approach to sex. It is a strange film in that the commentary is so puritan and narrow that even at the time it would have been somewhat out of step with the trends in cinema, in 2008 the commentary is so politically incorrect it is laughable.

The structure of the film seems to be to cover as much controversial material as possible, sex, sex and more sex, abortion, rape, people dying alone in old age homes, street gangs, drugs etc etc. The scenes discussing rape are outrageously over the top (suggesting rape causes lesbianism) and the scenes in the lesbian bar have an astoundingly homophobic



commentary, while of course showing the women kissing each other in the most titillating manner.

However, these things do not make this a bad film !! Watched today it is a rip roaring politically incorrect comedy. It is obvious many of the scenes have been faked and the commentary is so offensive, so conservative that it is both infuriating and funny. If you watch this with a broad sense of humour you will marvel at the filmmakers bigotry and laugh out loud at the way in which he chooses the most sexually charged scenes to show and then complains about it !! There is even an apocalyptic segment discussing Swedish underground shelters and how they want to be some sort of new "adam and eve" after the nuclear winter! A bizarre titbit to notice is that the soundtrack features the song "Mah-na-Mah-na" later to become a hit in The Muppet Show.

This is Mondo cinema at its most outrageous and since it is a very rare film it is great to see it made available. Out of all the Mondo films this is the hardest to find and it is great to see such a high quality release on DVD. Klubsuper 8 have done a superb job, the film is a marvellous print and the sound is as clear as can be.

This is a real winner and worth having in any Cult and Mondo films lovers library.

Web: <http://klubbsuper8.com/>

**Faces of Death
Volume 1 of the
Classic Mondo
Series
Umbrella
Entertainment
R4 DVD**

In the 1980's shockumentaries were the flavour of the day, their supposed aim was to show us a world we didn't know, from Asian customs to strange death rites, from native superstitions to unusual sexual practises, but in reality they were the epitome of exploitation cinema.

They took our fascination with the exotic and the unknown and threw it back in our faces in a vari-



Infamous Monkey scene: faked but still a shocker

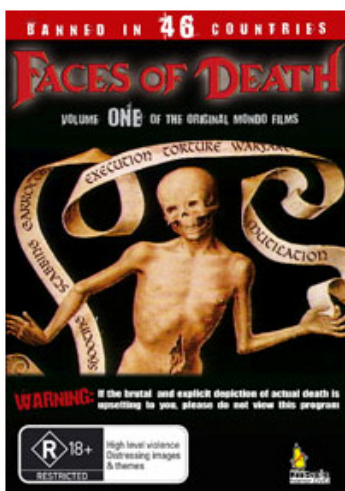
ety of bizarre and distorted forms. While there were many shockumentaries most of which proved quite successful, **Faces of Death** was the most impressive. It was originally made for a \$450,000 investment and has an estimated \$40 million thus far ! It was originally only made for Japanese release, but slowly began to leak into the international market to alarmed reactions. The fact that it seeped into the market via underground methods with clandestine copies on unmarked videotapes and then only received public release only increased its reputation. It ended up being banned in some 46 countries

What is amazing is how the media jumped on the bandwagon and never really researched or questioned the film, John Schwartz, who directed and wrote the movie and its sequels, was startled to note the sudden US media coverage the films was getting, they were being denounced on every channel from CBS to independents yet nobody talked to him to explore what they were about or more importantly, how much was real.

The concept of the snuff film came from the early fear and paranoia created by the Manson killings and the anti-hippy backlash at the end of the sixties, it is also interesting that this paranoia has surfaced time and time again during various periods, usually fed by diverse conspiracies theories and quite a bit of religious Puritanism.

After exhausting examination, the FBI in America and other agencies worldwide have never found a single snuff film nor by the way did they find any evidence of the vast conspiracies claimed.

It seems ever generation can be gripped by fear and terror and the fear of death is clearly





Superbly faked electrocution !

the greatest of them all. Accordingly, **Faces of Death** really touched a raw nerve. Introduced by a rather strange doctor (Dr. Gross), we are introduced to his diverse library of footage which is the result of his research into death. Certainly, the footage includes what the industry defines as "stock footage".

The director in various media interviews had discussed how he searched video libraries worldwide for clips of disasters, slaughterhouses, animal killings, autopsy rooms etc, however, most of the over the top scenes are clearly faked, indeed even the famous electrocution scene was supposedly created with lots of toothpaste foaming from a friend's mouth ! Current estimates suggest that some 40-50 percent of **Faces of Death** is faked footage and it could be much more.

Schwarz said in an interview with the St. Petersburg Times in 2000 "I was the leader of the flesh-eating cult," Schwartz admits. "I had scenes in each of these movies. . . . I'm the crazy, drugged-out killer. . . . I play this freaky rapist in the courtroom scene, and they show the rape on video, and it just so happens that the girl (in the rape scene) was this girl I was dating at the time." He continues.. "I am listed in Faces of Death credits as "Alan Black." "My middle name is Alan, and schwarz means black in German."

This does not, however, invalidate the nature of the film, it is too easy to be caught in the debate of what is real and fake footage and forget that this is a work of cinematic art, dark art, confronting and shocking art perhaps, but art nevertheless. Its presentations as a documentary is a marketing hook, its effectiveness as a film is something else.

Faces of Death must be evaluated as any other

film and judged as such, it has a profound emotional effect and mixes exploitation cinema with a truly perverse obsession with death and destruction created by high quality editing, intriguing narration and effective yet cheap special effects.

Released in 1978 it not only set the stage for later shock cinema but also for films which blur the line between documentary and cinematic story telling. It was released around the same time as **Alternative 3** (1977) which was a fake documentary suggesting a secret base on the moon which triggered hysteria and hundreds of thousands of calls to Anglia Television asking if it was real. In the end they had to issue a press release and news bulletin advising the documentary was a film and not real !!

Today such films as **Death of a President**, which uses a mixture of real and fake footage to explore what would occur if the president of the USA was shot are regularly seen on the market, while still triggering some controversy.

It is amazing to think that even today the vast majority of people who watch **Faces of Death** believe it is real. The emotional impact it has is startling. By combining real "stock" footage and carefully edited and cheaply created special effects it forges a mood and experience which is confronting and powerful, considering this was made in 1978 it is a testament to the dark vision of its director.

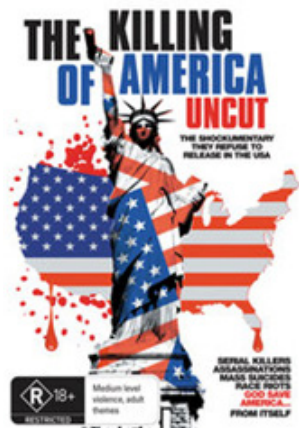
In Australia this film has had a lot of censorship problems and it is great to see it finally available in a high quality DVD edition, also included is the 39 minute documentary Faces of Death Fact or Fiction.

Sadly, while **Faces of Death** was given the green light, all further volumes were banned and hence are not available in Australia. They can easily be ordered directly from the US in various editions includes box sets.

Faces of Death is a challenging unique cinematic experience, there have been many attempts to copy it, such as the later **Death Scenes**, but its cinematic style, coupled with careful selection of footage and impressive editing and special effects put it in a class of its own.

**The Killing of
America Uncut
R4 DVD
Beyond
Entertainment**

I remember when I first saw **The Killing of America** on Video and I was shocked, very shocked. It left me unsure of how much this show was a genuine exploration of violence and serial killers in America and how much was just “shockumentary”.



**Serial Killer Edmund Kemper's personal
“trophies” in Killing of America.**

What worried me most was whether it “crossed the line” and sensationalized the subject and moreover exploited the victims of the crimes which had been perpetuated. I am still not sure. I am not adverse to violence in film but this film seemed to use a flood of violent images to overpower the viewer and I am unconvinced this is necessary to tell the story they have set out to tell.

Faces of death was a Shockumentary using part fake footage to create a story with black humour as well as shock value. **Mondo Cane** and related films used a balance of content with a sharp edged commentary. **The Killing of America** is all real footage and tries to be a “news documentary” while actually being an exploitation film.

The commentary tends to focus on statistics and hence the film lacks the analysis which could have made it a more serious documentary. If you are going to examine the extreme violence of the US and show it in gruesome detail surely you should also discuss the possible causes.

In the wake of the success of **Faces of Death**, **The Killing of America** was written by Leonard Shrader and his wife Chieko, he also directed. It was made for the Japanese market where **Faces of Death** was a huge success. The major difference is that where **Faces of Death** used obviously faked footage mixed with newsreel content, this is all terrifyingly real.

The researchers on this film must have been quite a team; they located some of the rarest newsreel footage, documents, stills and audio content in this field ever brought together into a film.

It opens with a mentally ill man shot dead on the street and works on from there to be an indictment of crime in the US. Extensive coverage is given both to major crimes including serial killers such as Charles Whitman, John Gacy, David Berkowitz, Charles Manson and Ted Bundy as well as to random killings, robberies etc. The footage is offered with a well structured commentary which attempts to put the information into context.

This is very shocking stuff and I will be surprised how many people watch it until the end. It is like a dark news report that just does not stop, there does not seem to be a light at the end of the tunnel and the footage just gets worse and worse from the Bundy Court case to Jim Jones and beyond.

In many ways the **Killing of America** marks the movement towards the “newer forms” of Shockumentary even though it was made in 1982. Gone are the fake footage, cynical commentary and playful tones and they are replaced with constant, hard edged violence.

That being said, this is a remarkable piece of documentary filmmaking and while certainly controversial, it is surprisingly well made, has a very professional presentation and brings together footage which is unique and has not been seen anywhere else. If you are interested in serial killers and the pathology of extreme violence this is a powerful visual experience. Just be aware it is very different from traditional Shockumentary's in that all its footage is real and much of it is exceptionally harrowing.

However, be warned, it is not for the faint of heart.

BANNED IN AMERICA

Banned in America
All Region DVD
(NTSC)
Brain Damage Films
Volumes 1-5

Faces of Death has a lot to answer for ! While **Mondo Cane** and other shockumentaries began the craze in unusual documentaries showing confronting and challenging footage, it was **Faces of Death** which focused in on torture, mutilation and death.

That being said **Faces of Death** was mostly faked and hence had a level of amusement mixed with in the horror. The newer trend in death shockumentaries is to focus on reality and this is where news and entertainment seem to merge.

Banned in America offers five volumes covering news footage and home video, it is all real – none of it is faked. Crime footage, accidents, suicides and lots more. It is shocking, confronting and very difficult to watch. So far every other shockumentary I have seen pales in comparison with this series.

Each volume is an unending march of death and destruction, a cavalcade of violence, accidents, torture, punishment and just about everything in-between.

The raison d'être of this series is to offer the clips, reports and news items which were censored from TV news. This series certainly does that. The news in the US, UK and Australia regularly "self censors" and do not show many items; personally I have been surprised by the amount of news available on the internet which does not show up in TV coverage. Clearly some of this is due to the highly violent nature of the footage and this is what is covered in this series.

What I do I think about it ? The reality is that crime and violence occurs and since such footage exists in a truly free media such reports



would be available to the general public (adults, of course). Viewers could then decide what to see and what not to see. Since this does not occur **Banned in America** offers us the opportunity to see a side of the world we would never see anywhere else.



There is no doubt this is a very dark series and presents a side of the world many of us might not want to see. For many viewers just getting through the first few clips will be hard work, never mind five volumes of harrowing content.

The sort of clips you can expect to see includes politicians blowing off their heads, suicides such as direct rifles to the face and lots and lots of car crashes with god knows how much mayhem. But there is more (!), hangings, hands being cut off, mutilations, medical madness and so on. There is a balance of footage from Western countries and other locations around the globe- this is World Cinema with teeth.

The clips are, of course, in various conditions. The editors have done the best they can but with such rare and controversial footage obviously it won't be pristine. The score is very powerful and certainly also ramps up the effect.

So should you see it ?

Well, it is hard to review a series which is really on the edge of being a wild journey through the dark side of the news. It is violent, confronting and shocking; at the same time it offers us the possibility to view things we have never been able to see before.

Whether you should take the risk and see them for yourself I leave up to you,. But for the daring, brace yourself for a very wild ride.

Web: [http:// www.braindamagefilms.com](http://www.braindamagefilms.com)

The Dark Justice of Jigsaw



Saw began as a low budget horror film created by Australians James Wan and Leigh Whannell. Wan and Whannell meet in film school and together produced a short film to showcase their concept for a new type of horror film. Whannell wrote the script and Wan directed and they produced it on a shoestring budget. To keep costs down Whannell himself played the main character of Adam. The sheer originality of the concept landed them a deal before they even landed in Los Angeles and the **Saw** franchise was born.

At present there are five films in the franchise which centres on the character of John Kramer who is known as the “Jigsaw Killer”. He is a unique form of serial killer and this is what sells the films. Jigsaw is not a random killer nor is he driven by psycho sexual desires or financial motives. In many ways he is not even a traditional psychopath, he is a killer with a very definite

purpose and does not see himself as a murderer. He creates tests using intricate traps for his victims, all of which are criminals of some form or another. These tests force them to re-evaluate their lives through extreme pain and suffering, in most cases involving some form of self mutilation. If they fail, they die and the vast majority do. In Jigsaw’s mind this is how it should be, most of them lack the nobility to take responsibility for themselves even if their lives are at risk and so they are not great loss.

In **Saw IV** we get some background on why John Kramer became the Jigsaw Killer. Kramer was a highly successful engineer and encouraged his wife Jill to pursue her own interests. She had a strong social conscience and ran a drug rehabilitation clinic. John had his doubts about her safety but did not want to curtail her freedom. He also believed that most of the drug addicts who used her clinic are not reformed by what was offered.

They simply became more reliant on others and ended up as an unnecessary cost to society. After she is mugged at the clinic by drug addict Cecil Jill loses their baby and John finds himself in a deep depressive malaise. He becomes more and more of a loner and slowly they drift apart and are divorced.



John Kramer/Jigsaw

However, John still loves Jill and cannot forget what has happened to their relationship and their one chance at having a child. He cannot let go of his bitterness and his anger towards those who freeloader off life increases.

John is diagnosed with cancer and when he finds it is inoperable he attempts suicide. His attempt fails but he has a new perspective on the world. He begins to realize that only through a confrontation with death will people wake up. He also decides that change must begin with the individual not with external penal and reform systems. The seeds of Jigsaw are born and Cecil is his first test case. The name Jigsaw comes from the piece of flesh he cuts from each victim symbolizing that something is missing from each of their lives.

Jigsaw now devises more and more complex and refined methods of testing his victims. In each case they have the opportunity to survive,

One of Jigsaw's tests, this time from Saw V



The Persona through which Jigsaw communicates..

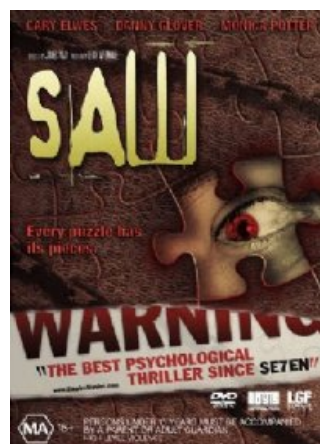
and this is the essence of the Jigsaw method, but at a great physical cost. In many cases the tests have strange ironic significance in relation to the victim's lives and there is a constant psychological as well as physical testing of each victim.

The unique character of Jigsaw is what makes the Saw franchise so fascinating and indeed so successful. While no one would advocate the sort of violence Jigsaw indirectly inflicts on his victims. He is not an insane killer, but someone who is working from a sense of meaning and this challenges and intrigues the viewer. Everyone has had a moment when they have become infuriated with those who abuse themselves and the world around them and the character of Jigsaw embodies this frustration. His is a mixture of a preacher of pain and home grown vigilante.

The plot of each film also brings together a range of popular cinema genres. The **Saw** films have a serial killer as their nexus who is also a type of vigilante and here alone we have two of the more popular cinematic genres – serials killers (and horror) and vigilantes/revenge films. At the same time there is the ongoing police detective drama as the team tries to find Jigsaw and hence **Saw** taps into the ongoing public obsession with crime and police cinema and TV. The complexity of the plot of each film keeps the audience guessing and hence has a lot in common with classic whodunit films. This mixture of genres makes the Saw franchise a fascinating cinematic success story uniting so many genres which have been successful on both TV and the big screen.

One of the most compelling aspects of *Saw* is the use of “traps.” Jigsaw uses these traps to fulfil his need for tests and these become more and more complex as the film franchise develops. On one level, admittedly perverse, the franchise is like some sort of “reality show” where people are forced to face their lives and if they push themselves through enough pain they win the “big prize” – their survival. It is because Jigsaw doesn’t kill these people that we become fascinated – he simply creates the arena and like some sort of gladiatorial games meet reality TV program the experience unfolds. The strange reality of the films is further enhanced by the puppet like toy that Jigsaw uses when he communicates.

In the first film of the **Saw** franchise, we are shown a squalid bathroom with two men chained by their ankles. One is Dr. Lawrence Gordon, the other is Adam Faulkner, a photographer and part time private investigator who has been following the doctor trying to prove he is cheating on his wife. There is a bloodied body on the floor between them with a gun in one hand and a recording device in the other. Together they listen to the pre-taped messages left for them. While Adam's tape challenges him to survive, Gordon's is far more threatening. Jigsaw instructs him to find a way of killing Adam within eight hours or else his wife and daughter will be killed.



Adam has a problem in the first *Saw* film

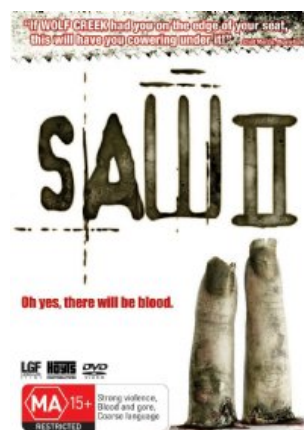


From here on in the psychological terror begins, clues are found, decisions must be made and time passes. Both despise the other but must work together to find possible clues to their escape. In the end Gordon saws off his own foot to survive and leaves Adam to die.

Jigsaw has also created an excellent subterfuge as the detectives suspect Gordon of being the Jigsaw killer. We also learn later that Amanda, one of the first survivors of Jigsaw who has become his accomplice, has intervened by returning and suffocating Adam as a sign of mercy. This does not endear her to Jigsaw whose approach to Justice is implacable.

Saw is brutal, visceral and violent, however compared to later *Saw* films it is more an exploration of the psychology of terror than torture and violence. It was made on a low budget with Whannell himself playing Adam. Originally it was thought it would be a minor success and slotted for a direct to DVD release, then it became a major hit at the box office and as they say, the rest is history.

Saw II is much bloodier than the first, obviously made on a better budget and offers far more complex and refined traps. It certainly increases the torture and gore level and this will continue throughout the franchise from now on. Jigsaw is dying from cancer and knows the police are on his trail. Rather than being worried, he is one step ahead of them. He has already kidnapped the son of Detective Eric Matthews. He also has a new game in play with a group of seven convicts locked inside a house that is slowly being filled with poison gas. Amanda Young, his protégé, is among them. The game is very simple: find antidotes to the toxin and a way out or die.



Jigsaw makes a deal with Detective Matthews. If he is willing to talk with him until the game is concluded he will tell him where his son is hidden. Jigsaw has focused in on Matthews as he has planted evidence on a regular basis, in other words he is a bent cop.

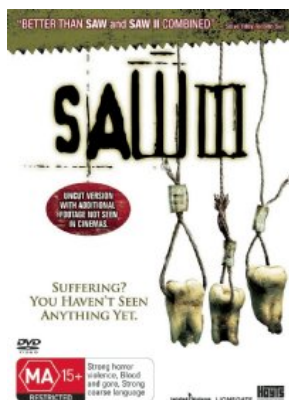


Complex traps in Saw II

Indeed the seven convicts in the game are his victims – but are no angels in the eyes of the law anyway, so Jigsaw is dealing with multiple problems with a single game. As tension arises to fever pitch, Matthews assaults Jigsaw forcing him to take him to where the game is in play. Of course Jigsaw knew in advance how Matthews would behave and when they arrive they find that the whole game has been already been played out in full and was simply being replayed from a recording.

The game now continues but on a bigger scale. Matthews son has been locked in a safe in Jigsaw's basement all the time keep alive on oxygen, but Matthews now must face Jigsaw's wrath. Of course, everything is not as it seems and soon he learns Jigsaw has an accomplice and he will be kept prisoner for a further game...

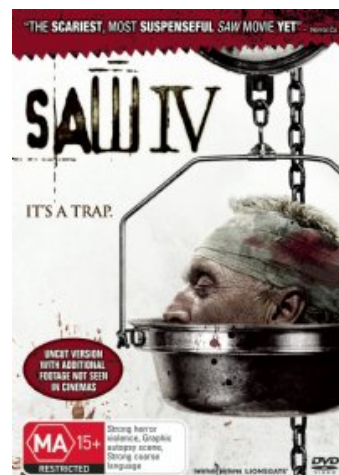
In **Saw III** things have radically changed. Jigsaw is barely alive confined to a hospital bed in a secret location. Amanda is now planning and executing his vision. However, Amanda has an agenda of her own. She does not believe people can change and hence has modified Jigsaw's designs so they cannot be escaped.



All her victims will die. Jigsaw is not pleased, he has his own understanding of rehabilitation and justice and believes that he is actually giving his "victims" a last chance at life – he now sees Amanda as a common murderer.

Saw III has a complex plot and the climax is impressive. As Jigsaw is dying, Lyn, a surgeon who is having marital problems, is forced to keep him alive; the surgical scenes are confronting to say the least and the game involving Lyn compelling. At the same time Amanda works on Jeff, a man whose life has been destroyed by his desire for revenge against a drunk driver who killed his son. Jeff must confront a myriad of devices and ultimately himself. Jigsaw knows Amanda is tampering with his devices and so decides to set up a further test for Amanda, when she fails both Jigsaw and Amanda are killed.

Saw IV really occurs simultaneously with **Saw III** with focuses on Lieutenant Mark Hoffman who is now a protégé of Jigsaw. It involves painful tests for Officer Rigg who must work through not one but many traps and tests. His ultimate failure also brings about the death of Eric Matthews.



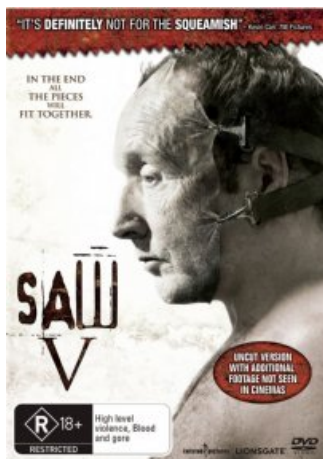
We clearly see that Jigsaw is dead and get up and personal on an autopsy (get ready for that one). Inside Jigsaw's stomach is a tape which informs Hoffman that the work of Jigsaw has

Saw IV again does not disappoint with new more elaborate tests



not finished and Hoffman will face many tests ahead. A lot of loose ends are tied up from earlier movies and more of a back story is offered so we understand the motivations behind Jigsaw and how John Kramer became the Jigsaw Killer. **Saw IV** has a surprising level of character development especially compared to Saw III and was very well received.

Saw V is the latest in the franchise and just like the last few films certainly ups the violence, gore and torture. At the same time the plot is still very compelling and the way in which the tale has been continued even after Jigsaw's death is a testimony to excellent storytelling.



Saw V explores events both before and after Jigsaw's demise with a focus on the connections between Jigsaw and Lieutenant Mark Hoffman. We come to understand for the first time how Jigsaw recruited Hoffman. Hoffman was a cop on the edge, an alcoholic driven by sorrow caused by his sister's death. In despair he created a copycat killing in Jigsaw style to take revenge on Seth, his sister's murderer. Jigsaw confronts Hoffman and through the use of a fairly simple trap convinces Hoffman to come on board and use this method of dealing with recalcitrants. Hoffman agrees that Jigsaw's "rehabilitation" methods give his victims at least a chance at survival and sees the potential of

Work together or else—a hard lesson for these five it seems...



Mark Hoffman—The New Jigsaw

his methods.

Hoffman becomes Jigsaw's offside and we see various traps and tests that they work together. As Jigsaw dies he requests Hoffman put a last game into play. This game involves five people confronted with a series of traps which they need to conquer to survive. Jigsaw tells Hoffman he will not understand the reason behind this game nor its significance until its completion.

The five victims must work together to survive the traps which are brutal, bloody and violent. To really succeed the five needed to work together, of course they didn't and only two make it, maybe. We are left unsure as they are found bleeding and mutilated on the floor at the end of the film.

As part of the trap, Hoffman has also been able to set up Peter Strahm who has been hot on his tail and could easily expose him as the new "Jigsaw". Through ingenious planning Strahm is drawn into the game and when he fails the test, pays the ultimate price. He is squashed like a fly, literally.

There are lots of nice "textures" to **Saw V** including the careful planning of the game by Jigsaw and Hoffman, Jigsaw's legacy to his wife which helps protect Hoffman to continue the Jigsaw work and the subplot involving getting Strahm out of the way.

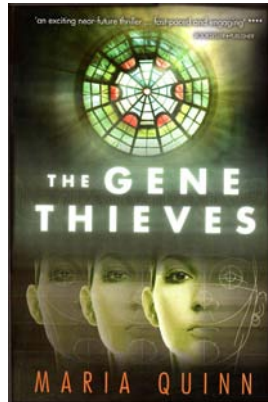
Saw V is an excellent balance of character development, a solid plot, lots of gore, intricate traps and crime drama. A great climax to a very creative and innovative franchise. The question of course remains, is this the last instalment or does the new Jigsaw have more in store for us.

BOOKS IN REVIEW



The Gene Thieves
Maria Quinn
Harper Voyager 2009

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich



This debut novel from Australian author Maria Quinn is set in the near future, when genetic engineering of babies is becoming not only possible, but popular. The genes for various appearance traits are being discovered and techniques are being developed to introduce these traits into embryos. Many people are now using the services of surrogate mothers to bring their baby to term. Sperm and eggs are routinely saved for producing future offspring. The laws about such matters have been gradually sorted out and tightened up, and the procedures are now pretty much standard.

“Piggy” Brown is a lonely genetic scientist who has made his money by developing a blue-eye gene that has proved incredibly popular with the Japanese. He has now been quietly and successfully working away on gene work to reduce the degenerative effects of old age – not quite an Immortality gene, but not far off it. The world’s big pharmaceutical companies keep watch on gene work in case there are profits to be made. They monitor professional publications, equipment purchases, and research work and indulge in quite a lot of industrial espionage. They are aware of Piggy’s work.

So is the United Nations’ Ethical Science Committee. This group prefers that work that could benefit humanity should be shared publicly, not held by one company for profit. Although they can’t match the financial rewards of the big pharma companies they can offer prestige, Nobel Prizes, and international fame as a reward. Jack Lee, their leading investigator, is dispatched to approach Piggy and see if he can be persuaded to go public with his work. What they are not aware of is that Piggy has a private agenda. Since he was a child, Piggy has been

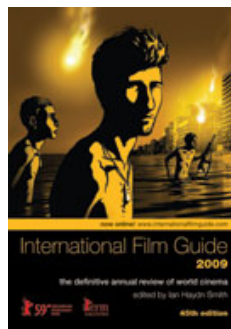
ostracized as a freak because of his stunted, pig-like appearance. Piggy believes it was due to a genetic accident on his father’s side, and his obsession is to use saved eggs and sperm from his parents to produce a perfect child – his brother, in fact – that he will bring up free of the suffering he endured as a child. This is still illegal. He has engaged a lawyer skilled in the genetics laws to clear the legal obstacles. The lawyer owes Piggy a debt – he was one of the kids who mistreated Piggy so badly in his youth.

Piggy’s baby is kidnapped to put pressure on him to give his research to one of the pharma companies. Can Jack Lee get the baby back without revealing the legal problems of its parentage? The people involved must all reassess their lives in this close examination of the developing problems of surrogacy and babies on demand.

The story puts pressure on currently established beliefs, particularly religious ones, but presents a plausible scenario where the legal problems of genetics can be overcome. The human side of the story shows that far from being a mechanical process, parenting can still have room for love and compassion. In some ways the story takes up where John Wyndham’s “Trouble With Lichen” leaves off. This story from 1960 dealt with the development of an immortality drug and the legal, ethical and social disruption that it caused. Genetics has the same potential, and Maria Quinn’s novel deals with these problems on a more personal level.

The science fiction, mystery and detective story angles are covered with the same skill that I would expect from a British author – there is no Buck Rogers here, just a good solid story built up on a logical base of the current technology. This is something the British excel at, and Maria Quinn has shown herself to be their equal. It is excellent work for a first book. The story never gets boring, the science is clearly explained where necessary, the characters are skilfully drawn and believable. I look forward to seeing more of Ms Quinn’s work.

**International Film Guide
2009
45th Edition
Wallflower Press 2009
Editor: Ian Haydn Smith**



The International Film Guide is recognized as the definitive annual review of world cinema providing unrivalled coverage of filmmaking and International film festivals in more than 120 countries from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe.

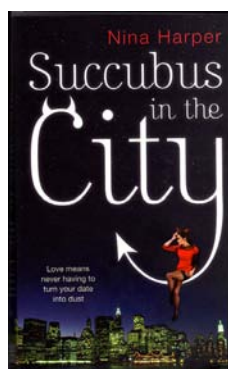
First published in 1963, the International Film Guide enjoys an unrivalled reputation as the most authoritative and trusted source of information on contemporary world cinema. Comprehensive international coverage is offered via a 'World Survey' section encompassing the cinematic output and film industry trends and developments in over 120 countries, written by expert local correspondents who present critical reviews assessing features, documentaries and shorts. The 2009 edition will also include articles on five 'Directors of the Year', a 'Country Focus' on Israel, an 'Industry Focus' on digital exhibition, and a 'Special Focus' on the recent expansion of the EU and the impact on the film community of those new member states.

The volume also includes detailed breakdowns of international box office statistics and film festival award-winners, plus detailed listings and descriptions of hundreds of International Film Festivals.

**Succubus in the City
Nina Harper
Hachette Australia 2008**

Reviewed: Bob Estreich

Yes, the story has a resemblance to a certain TV sitcom. Unlike the sitcom, this spoof is very funny. Lily has a dream job as fashion editor on a large magazine, stunning looks and a figure she can never lose, a glorious apartment in one of the better parts of New York, and a small group of girlfriends who are always there for her. She is also a succubus. She is an immortal demon who has a contract with Satan to deliver a quota of souls to Hell each month. She tempts men to her apartment for sex, and if they climax before she does they vanish in a



puff of smoke, leaving just a pile of ash. She is quite at ease with her job, since she usually targets men who are no loss to society anyway – drunks, wife beaters, cheating husbands, and pretentious people with no fashion sense.

The one part of Lily's lifestyle that concerns her is that she has not found real love for over a thousand years, and she is starting to feel a little lonely. If a man loves her, knowing that she is a succubus, she has the option of being released from her contract and becoming mortal again. Until that happens, though, she has her girlfriends to fall back on. They are demons as well and fully understand Lily's plight. If things get too much on top of her, ice cream with her girlfriends will usually help (after all, she doesn't have to worry about her figure – working for Satan has its perks). The little group become aware that they are under surveillance, but who is watching them? Why? Some of them well remember the Burning Men from the old witch-hunting days, and they become alarmed in case the modern-day crazies decide to indulge in a little more witch burning. Satan is also concerned and She sends them a Librarian (a cat demon who is an excellent researcher in the more arcane areas) to help them locate their watchers.

Lily meets a man she becomes seriously interested in. Could he be The One of her dreams? Her girlfriends advise caution, in case he is one of the witch burners, but Lily finds it harder to take their advice as she falls in love with him. As the book cover so eloquently puts it, "Can a sweet-talking mortal and a girl from Hell ever really find true love?"

The story has a wonderful tongue in cheek feel that copies the style of the (unnamed) TV sitcom, with its obsession with fashion, the Right people, boyfriends, restaurants, etc. The characters are wonderfully drawn, not caricatures. Even the cat demon's personality is described just as I imagine a cat demon would be – supercilious, demanding. Nina Harper manages to name-drop just about every fashion label there is, and seems to be comfortable with every fashionable eatery. She is based in New York and has a background in fashion, and it gives the story a really credible edge. Although verging on the trivial nature of the TV show, the book has just the right amount of drama to elevate it to the standard of a really good mystery read, hilarious as it is. Its lighthearted style sits on top of a good plot and some serious writing ability. Let's hope for a sequel.



Wildsville
The Art of Derek Yaniger
Korero Books 2008
Tower Books Australia

Derek Yaniger is a master of low brow and retro, he regularly publishes in such magazines as Atomic, Barracuda, and Car Kulture Deluxe and does prints for shows such as Hukilau, Tiki Oasis, and the Wild Weekend and is well known for his illustrations for the Cartoon Network and Marvel Comics.

What is low brow you may ask ? While it was originally a derogative term, it came to be used to describe an underground art movement that developed in Los Angeles and environs during the late 1970s.

It developed into a very widespread art movement with origins in underground comics, punk music, hot-rod street culture, retro, tiki and other subcultures. It is also sometimes known as pop

surrealism. Yaniger is a major exponent of low brow and retro art forms and Wildsville is a superb compendium of his work.

This is the only book devoted to Yaniger's book covers, magazine art, gallery work, clip art, signage, serigraphs, convention posters as well as his work for the Cartoon Network and Marvel Comics.

It includes a lot of rare pieces not seen anywhere else. It contains more than 150 original paintings and illustrations reproduced in superb, indeed, garish colours.

His work celebrates the low brow retro style of the 1950's re-visioned through a very modern lens. It is a world of tikis, hillbillies, burlesque, hotrods, booze, rock n roll, beatniks, monsters and woman in tight sweaters.

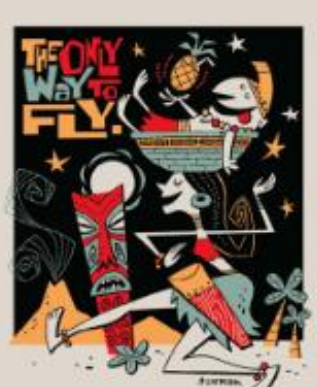
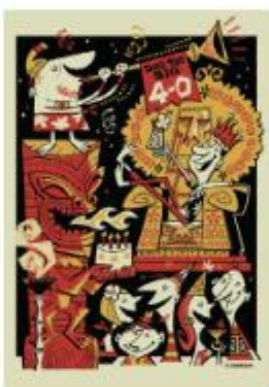
His work combines the old and the new, a 50's sensibility with a modern feel. It is marked by lots of geometric shapes, cartoon figures, folk images, cut-out lettering and strong colours, strange monsters, cars, sex and booze.

There is a solid introduction with a good basic biography and then the floodgates open and we get to experience the world through Yaniger's eyes – it is a weird and wacky place but ever so cool.

This is a superb quality hardcover, oversized and 112 pages. It offers some 150 high quality images beautifully reproduced with excellent background and descriptive notes.

You can also explore Derek's work via his website which has all sorts of goodies available from prints to his software and of course his limited edition Tikis !

Derek Art
Web:
www.derekart.com



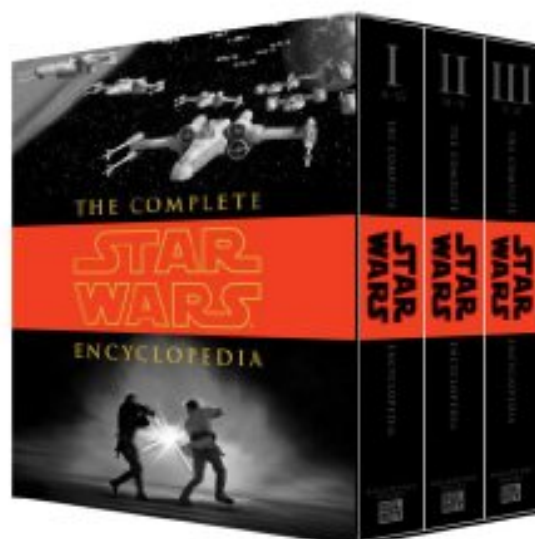
STAR WARS

The Complete Star Wars Encyclopedia
Stephen J. Sansweet, Pablo Hidalgo, Bob Vitas and Daniel Wallace
Del Rey 2008
Bookwise Australia

Star Wars has been around for 30 years and is considered a major science fiction phenomenon. From what was considered somewhat of a “boys own adventure” in space it matured into a complex sequences of films and along the way has spawned a wide range of merchandise from action figures to books, collectibles to artwork as well as developing its own intricate mythology and multifaceted characters. The first edition of Stephen J. Sansweet's **The Star Wars Encyclopedia** came out some eleven years ago, it was a book of around 380 pages and was considered pretty definitive. However, the Star Wars universe soon began to evolve including many Special Edition DVDs, Star Wars Episode 1: The Phantom Menace and myriad other offerings, ranging from computer games to RPG titles, card games and novels.

Stephen J. Sansweet kept his finger on the pulse of the Star Wars experience and in collaboration with Pablo Hidalgo, Bob Vitas and Daniel Wallace, has updated The Star Wars Encyclopedia to create what is a true goliath in the world of Sci Fi publishing.

Some twelve kilos in weight, over 1200 pages in length and three hardcover volumes presented in a slipcase, this is quite an astounding release.

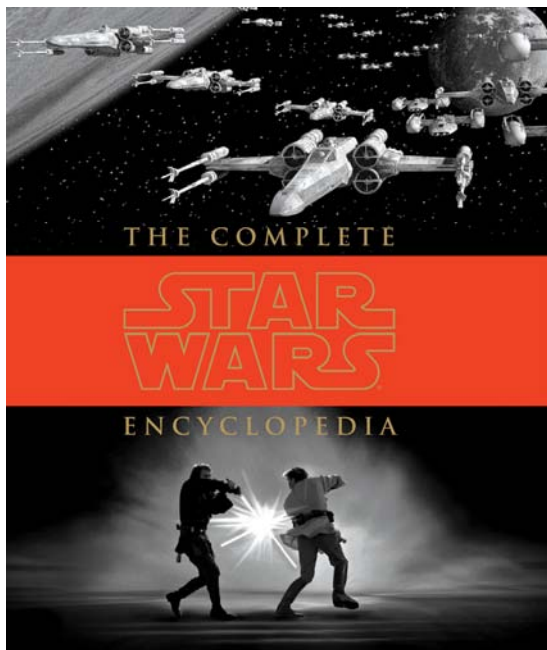


Since there is now some 30 years of Star Wars history to draw from the encyclopedia is divided into three beautifully presented volumes divided into A-G, H-O, and P-Z. It uses a simple two to three code reference at the end of each reference (ESB for The Empire Strikes Back, for example), so you can easily identify the source of the material.

This allows for an easy to follow encyclopedia where you can refer to the sources if you want to but are not overwhelmed with references.

The encyclopedia offers extensive and comprehensive entries without being overwhelming.

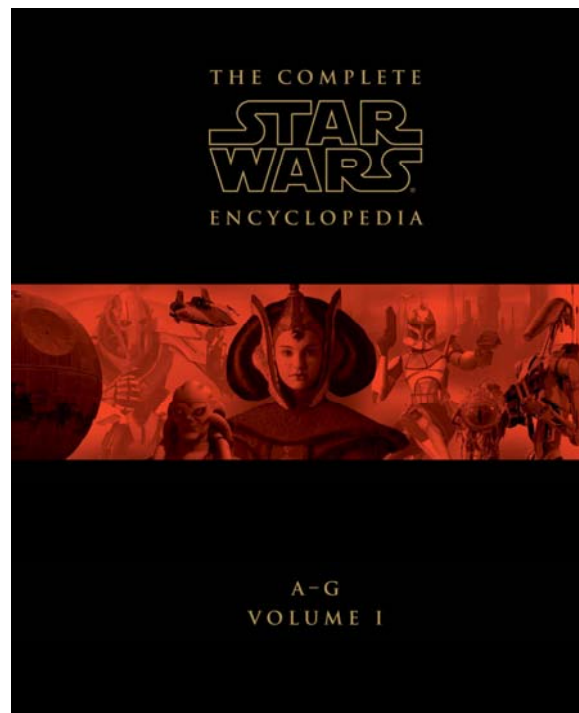
The Complete Star Wars Encyclopedia is illustrated throughout and includes an incredible diversity of graphical content.



Illustrations range from what we may expect; stills from the feature films, animated series, television etc as well as more unusual content covering video games, comics, books, card games and other materials. What I especially like about this is that it gives you varying visions of the Star Wars world from the “official” Star Wars content to how others have adapted it. Each letter in the encyclopedia is also prefaced with a full size plate and this is also a nice touch.

The Complete Star Wars Encyclopedia has been written as though it is a scholar’s reference work produced by historians living some 20 years after the events they are chronicling. It shows a special interest in the mythology of the Star Wars universe using the vision of George Lucas as well as the games and novels which are licensed by Lucasfilm, the characters, planets, weapons, life-forms, societies, institutions and spacecraft described in them are also covered in detail. This emphasis on the “mythological” framework of the series is especially intriguing and offers a wealth of information which would otherwise have to be assembled from many diverse sources.

There is coverage of everything in the Star Wars universe, from biography to botany, key chronologies and cosmologies and more, from the most significant details to the most obscure. Extensive research has been undertaken to resolve confusions in the development of the Star Wars story include some final clarification about some confusing issues such as the identities of Woof and Klaatu which many Star Wars fans wondered about.



To have all this Star Wars material in one place is an absolute wonder.

Just some of the noteworthy contents include:

Superb and quite stunning character portraits of both the renowned (Luke Skywalker, Queen Amidala, Darth Vader) and the obscure (Tnun Bdu, Tycho Celchu, Bib Fortuna)

Comprehensive coverage of the natives and customs of planets as diverse as Tatooine and Hoth, Dagobah and Kashyyyk.

Extensive coverage of the rituals and traditions of Jedi Knights and Sith Lords.

A timeline of major events in Star Wars history, from the Clone Wars and the inception of the Empire to the rise and fall of Anakin Skywalker and the invasion of the monstrous Yuuzhan Vong.

Many of the images, screen shots and pictures have not been seen in print before.

There is a lot of material in these volumes which would be difficult to find anywhere else, the editors have such an intricate knowledge of Star Wars that you will be surprised how much you didn’t know about Star Wars, even if you are a great fan !

Certainly this is a volume that comes at a cost, however, if you are a Star Wars fan it is an absolute must have !

DVD REVIEWS



10 Dead Men

R1 DVD

MTI Home Video

Web: <http://www.mtivideo.com>

Web: <http://www.tendeadmen.co.uk/>

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

The British seem to have overtaken the U.S. for gangster films. Perhaps this has something to do with the quality of the actors, or the British preference for strong plots and good characterization. These qualities show up at their best in their small productions, like this one. Although MTI specializes in the distribution of independents, I had to check that this did not come from a major studio. The quality of the film is that good.

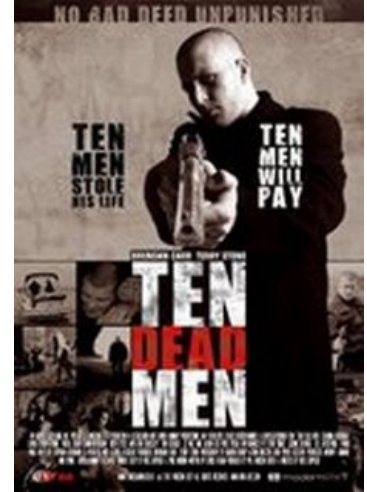
The plotline is fairly conventional – skilled gangland killer Ryan (Brendan Carr) falls in love and decides to leave the mob for a conventional lifestyle. He owes a favour to one of the mob members and is called on to repay his debt.

Things go badly wrong and he is caught, savagely beaten, forced to watch his girlfriend being executed, and then shot and left for dead. The rest of the film deals with revenge against the ten men who took his new life away, with a rather surprising ending.

Be prepared for a lot of gore, splatter and torture.



The British are not oversensitive to bloody violence in their films, and if it is necessary to the plot they will include it. This gives their gangsters a level of evil that seems to be lacking in the carefully sanitized U.S. films.



The plot is carried by an anonymous narrator. At first I wasn't sure about this, but it turns out that the film was originally intended to be somewhat longer but the funding ran short. The narrator is a useful device to keep the plot moving without having to film extra scenes. Intentional or not, in the end it does not detract from the film, and the well-crafted script actually allows the narrator to add a little to the emotions of the actors.

The actors and technical staff all have some previous experience, but the quality of their work is far above what you would expect. If there is a disappointment in the film, it is probably Keith Eyles as the gang's "Project Manager". This is not due in any way to Eyles' acting, but to the way his character is written.

I can't help thinking that he was modelled on "Bricktop", the thoroughly evil, menacingly schoolmasterly arch villain from Guy Ritchie's **Snatch**. Bricktop was one of the best characters in a British film, but the Project Manager clone just doesn't quite have the same aura.

This aside, if you don't mind a lot of blood, pain and suffering in a gritty gangster film, this is well worth your time.

For a gangster film it is good, for an independent it is brilliant.

88 Minutes
Buena Vista /
Disney
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

For years Disney has been the home of cute, inoffensive kids movies, sickeningly nice and produced to a formula. Some years ago they changed tack and distributed and produced some more mainstream films. Perhaps the most notable was *National Treasure*, a film that showed that they had not forgotten how to do quality work.

Since then they have issued an odd mix of genres as they re-establish themselves as a maker of good films. *National Treasure* was good in a rather wholesome, appropriately Disney way. **88 Minutes** shows that they will also handle the darker suspense genre. Perhaps they have finally decided to apply their not inconsiderable talents to mainstream film making? It works in this movie. **88 Minutes** is an impressive suspense film produced by Jon Avnet.

Al Pacino plays the lead role of Dr Jack Gramm, a psychological profiler and academic who was instrumental in locking away a serial killer eight years ago. Gramm is a womanizer, entirely sure he was right in his profile of the killer, and he is also hiding a dark secret of his own. The appeals have run out and the execution of the serial killer is scheduled, then a series of similar murders begins. This time some of the evidence



Working against the clock

points to Jack Gramm himself and forces him to question his role and accuracy as a profiler.

Then a phone call tells him he has only eighty eight minutes to live. This number is significant to Jack Gramm for reasons hidden in his past, and he is forced off balance as the killer keeps playing psychological games with him. People around him, people he knows and respects, are becoming the victims. Is there a copycat killer? Is someone seeking revenge on him for a past prosecution? Or was he wrong, and the real killer is still on the loose?

Pacino's mature acting is perfect for the part, and the major actresses in the supporting roles and in Jack's life (Alicia Witt, Leelee Sobieski and Amy Brenneman) play their roles with skill and style. John Forster as the serial killer is menacing and brilliant. Avnet builds up the tension of Gary Scott Thompson's script skillfully and does not let up until the film's conclusion. He carries the plot with a minimum of special effects, and successfully navigates his way through the subjects of lesbianism, murder, and torture. These were traditionally no-go areas for Disney films.

Pacino in 88 Minutes



The film shows quality workmanship in a way that so many other U.S. film makers have neglected – good scripts, no reliance on special effects, excellent characterization, and just plain brilliant acting. That's the reason I am reviewing this film - it is not part of the traditional Synergy style, but the suspense is done so well that I don't think it is out of place here.

Give it a try – it shows what happens when good scripts, good technicians and good actors get together. It's a cliffhanger (literally) right to the very end.

Adulthood

Directed and written by Noel Clarke

R4 DVD

Hopscotch Films

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

An earlier film, **Kidulthood**, introduced Sam Peel. Sam was a young street punk in west London who inadvertently kills a gang rival and is sentenced to prison for the murder. In this film, we meet Sam again on his release from prison six years later. Sam is played by Noel Clarke

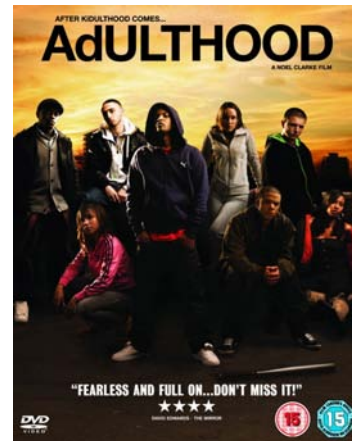
He returns to his home territory to find things have gone downhill since he was put away. His mother is a social outcast, his younger brother is following his footsteps into gang membership, he is hated by his victim's friends, and most people would rather have nothing to do with him. Sam wants nothing more than to resume his life and stay out of trouble, but those who hate him believe he is out for revenge for his time in prison.

Much of the power in the neighborhood is now held by paranoid drug dealer Jay, brilliantly

Noel Clarke: Director, Writer and Actor.



played by Adam Deacon. Jay hates Sam for the death of his gang friend, and is convinced Sam is out to kill him. When he learns Sam is trying to contact him, Jay feels he must kill Sam before Sam gets him.



As Sam tries to get in touch with Jay to calm down the situation and explain that he holds no grudges, all the people affected by the murder must reassess their dis-integrating lives and loyalties.

Sam's return can be an inspiration to some, but is an instrument of destruction to others. Sam is shocked at how many people his actions have adversely affected, but it looks like he will not be able to make up for it and resume his life. In spite of his regrets he is powerless to stop the inevitable confrontation between himself and Jay.

The entire cast deliver quality performances and there are too many of them to name, but they all fit perfectly into the grimy street environment.

There are only two negatives of any note.

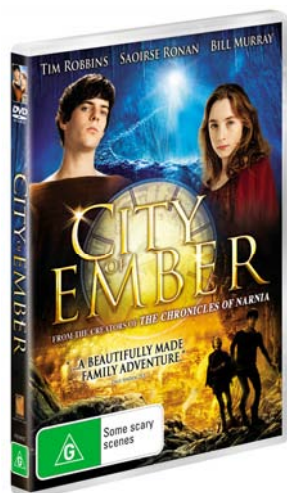
The excessive swearing will turn off some viewers, and the brief bursts of tuneless music do nothing to enhance the film. Apart from these, it is a powerful high-tension film that is well worth a look. Noel Clarke has been nominated for a Rising Talent BAFTA award.

This film shows that he well deserves it. Watch out for more of his films. His talents will make him a worthy addition to the British film industry.

Kidulthood was released is available in Australia from Roadshow Entertainment. **Adulthood** continues to explore many of the same themes.



**The City of
Ember**
R4 Blu Ray & DVD
Icon Entertainment
Release Date:
10/04/09



The City of Ember is an unusual sort of kid's film which will satisfy both young and adult viewers alike. It is a science fiction/fantasy film which has a surprisingly dark edge and at times seems to have much in common with **City of Lost Children** and even **Dark City**. It has a "steampunk" look which is both disconcerting and mesmerising. It was directed by Gil Kenan, whose previous work was with *Monster House*, this is his first live action film and it is an impressive if not somewhat quirky debut.

The plot of the **City of Ember** is based on the novel by Jeanne Duprau and is both straight forward sci fi storytelling and an allegory. At times it seems to resonate with Plato's classic tale of the cave, at others a social critique with Ember as a microcosm of society with its hierarchies, corruptions and compromises – ranging from the clearly morally bankrupt political system to the deluded religious "singers".

The city of Ember was build when some unnamed cataclysm brought about the demise of humanity; somehow a group of people are chosen to live in a new proto city underground. It seems they are not told what has occurred around them. The "project" is meant to last for 200 years. The mayor is given a box which includes details of what has occurred and a means to leave the underground city, it is

Bill Murray as the bungling Mayor



passed from mayor to mayor until a disaster hits and the box is lost, it hits the 200 year mark in a dusty wardrobe.

The city is not faring well, the large generator which controls its power is failing and they have run out of parts to fix it. Insects are growing to an immense size and slowly infiltrating the city. The hierarchy is confused and bumbling, jobs are assigned by a sort of lottery and the great day of the year, the Singing Day is a celebration of mindless patriotism and pseudo religious fervour.

However, the hierarchy is in denial about the real problem, black outs are occurring more and more, the electrical grid and plumbing is failing and the city is beginning to panic. Two teens, Lina Mayfleet and Doon Harrow begin to ask questions and find the infrastructure of the city in a state of decay. When Lina finds the "mayoral" box, they begin to search for a way into the outside world. This is a dangerous quest, it is illegal to try and leave Ember and Linas father died trying.

My only criticism of the **City of Ember** was that it has lots ideas which could have better developed if the film was not squarely aimed at a younger audience, at times it seems many aspects of the film (such as the gigantic insects etc) have been toned for a PG audience and this seems a shame. I had a similar criticism of **The Golden Compass**. While it was a film I greatly enjoyed the book has a lot more depth which was seemingly sacrificed for a more general "children's" market film.

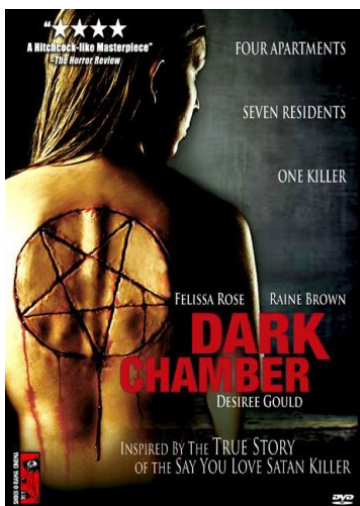
In any event, this is a fascinating and enthralling film which has lots of fascinating themes and motifs. For younger viewers it works well as a simple "lost children" adventure type film, though with a dark undercurrent.

For the rest of us it has lots of superb characters Bill Murray as the mindless mayor is superb and Tim Robbins as the disillusioned visionary who once tried to leave Ember is equally impressive. While the plot and acting is impressive, it is the look and feel of the film which is truly striking. It is such a strange mixture of the future and the past, decay and collapse. The climatic scenes where the boats escape back to the surface are nicely animated and certainly fast paced.

While it was a film I greatly enjoyed, the book has a lot more depth which was seemingly sacrificed for a more general appeal.

Dark Chamber
R0 NTSC
Shock-O-Rama
Cinema

Dark Chamber may be a low budget film but don't let that fool you. What it may lack in finesse it makes up with an impressive plot, suspenseful mood and surprisingly superior acting.



Justin has spent the last five years living with his mother. He has been working overtime to cover her bills and yet she spends her days in a drug induced haze. He finally decides he has had enough, leaves her a note and moves in with his detective father. The house of his childhood is not as he remembers; the upstairs section has been converted into units and rented out.

The occupants are all suitably bizarre: two sisters, one of which is a massage therapist (offering a bit more on the side) and the other a mentally disturbed girl with an obsession with fire, an sickly old man who seems to never come out of his room and whose only pleasure is the occasional prostitute and a couple where the husband is an aggressive frustrated writer and the wife seems bruised and abused.

Justin tries to make friends with a young girl who he meets one day outside the house. He is quite a religious young man (and at times seems to wear it on his sleeves) and yet on a

Black Circle Killer



dark night falls for her charms and has a one night fling.

She becomes immediately obsessive and one wonders if this is going to be a "Fatal Attraction" film as she stalks him relentlessly. She calls him incessantly, spends nights outside his home and watches him from a distance. Soon she resorts to ominous threats and emotional blackmail.

However, after an evening of her watching him from a distance. Justin and his friend notice a garbage bag placed obviously outside his home, on investigation Justin finds her lifeless body in it. Before he can report it he is kidnapped and left in a garage where he "comes to" the following morning. When he returns home he finds his father has been investigating a series of murders by a group called the Black Circle, a supposed Satanic cult

Justin believes one of the occupants of the units is the killer and so begins surveillance using hidden cameras, hence the insight we gain into their lives. An intriguing aside is that while they are installing the cameras they find wires of what look like a previous surveillance system in the walls, is this significant? We only find out later.

As Justin and his friends monitor the units we are drawn into all manner of personal conflicts, potential violence and, at times, voyeurism. As the film progresses the danger to Justin and his friends increases as the identity of the killer creeps into view, the final revelation is well done and the films ability to tie all the threads together is accomplished.

The character development, acting and dialogue is solid, especially for a low budget film.

The look of *Dark Chamber* creates an eerie and moody feel which is assisted by a powerfully melancholic soundtrack.

Dark Chamber is an interesting film which has elements of **Fatal Attraction**, **Rear Window** and even **Panic Room**, the fact that it cannot be easily pigeon-holed makes it even more effective. This is a movie with no nudity and minimal violence and yet one that packs enough suspense and mood to create a very edgy work of cinema.

Disaster Movie Icon Entertainment R4 DVD & Blu Ray

There are many different types of comedy from refined wit to slapstick, stand-up to parody and spoof. The use of parody has been with us a long time and some of more notable examples are films such as **Airplane**, **Naked Weapon** and the **Scream** series. What the Scream series did for horror, Disaster Movie attempts to do for the disaster genre with mixed results.

Disaster films have always been popular from early 70's classics such as **The Towering Inferno** and **The Poseidon Adventure** to **Armageddon**, **The Day after Tomorrow** and **The Core**. The sheer diversity of these films are incredible, from floods to volcanoes, man-made disasters to comets, fire and tornadoes to germ warfare and beyond. Disaster Film uses the framework of the traditional disaster film to create a parody based plot mixed with a fast paced send-up of every possible recent film and celebrity.

Will has a strange dream in which he has been in the reality TV show **Gladiator** and somehow bumps into Amy Winehouse, she gives him a prophecy about the end of the world and some mumbo jumbo about a crystal skull after a series of very long burps. Will is rather young at heart and while in his twenties is holding a teen sixteen party since he never had one when he was younger, he also has lots of commitment issues. As the party reaches full swing, disaster hits and

Iron Man about to get crushed by a cow !



they must try and escape the city to save themselves. Disaster occurs on disaster from earthquakes to comets, a freezing wind to a Tornado. The city is decimated and everyone is escaping even down to the last superhero.

As they are heading out of the city, Will receives a phone call from his girlfriend Amy who is pinned to the floor by a fallen statue in the Museum of Natural History. He decides, against all odds, to return to save his girlfriend and along the way return the crystal skull to its pedestal at the Museum. It seems that its removal has caused all these disasters to occur and unless it can be returned by 9 o'clock the world will end. While this is the arc of the plot, the movie is filled to the brim with every possible movie parody from **High School Musical** to **Batman**, **Hellboy** to **Iron Man**, **Beowulf** to **Sex and the City**. You could spend way too long noting all the movies references as it not only parodies scenes from movies but characters as well from Kung Fu Panda to Iron Man, Hancock to The Hulk. Along the way we are also treated to caricatures of major celebrities from Michael Jackson to Amy Winehouse.

Some parodies are used more extensively than others, the spoof of High School Musical is amusing offering sexually charged musical numbers which ridicule the squeaky clean "Disney" approach of the original film. There are lots of in-jokes, dirty references and toilet humor as well as deliberate gender parodies using drag, gay jokes and so on, the naked Beowulf certainly gets a serve.

While it is very fast paced, it drags in places and does seem too much like a long drawn out comedy skit. It will also date very quickly, unless you know all the films, musicians and characters being referenced, it will fall pretty flat. While it is certainly a damn good laugh and there are some real flashes of comedic brilliance, these are few and far between. As an one-off burst of comedy madness it lightened my night, but I certainly wouldn't want to watch it again. While It only came in at 90 minutes I found my "boredom" alarm going off quite a few times. There was just too much of the same type of humor and the same types of jokes over and over again.

The DVD also includes loads of extras including a commentary, featurettes and various sing-a-long songs. The "I'm F**king Matt Damon Sing-a-long" is extremely funny, taking the song from the movie and moving the crassness of the humor up a few notches.



Flashpoint
Police drama TV series
Hopscotch Films
R4 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

This drama series originally started as a proposed two hour pilot called Critical Incident, coming from a CTV writers competition. CTV decided to rewrite the story as a full 13-episode series. In early 2008 CBS Paramount joined in the project. At this point the U.S. writers guild strike was in full swing, and U.S. companies were searching outside their borders for new content. The series went to air in July 2008. The first episode attracted 1.1 million viewers in Canada. In the U.S. the audience numbers were even higher, with one episode watched by 8.2 million viewers.

Flashpoint was written by Mark Ellis and Stephanie Morgenstern and produced by Ann-Marie La Traverse and Bill Mustos for CTV and CBS Paramount TV networks.

The series is about a mythical Strategic Response Unit based in a large city. The city is recognizably Toronto, but the show could be anywhere if it wasn't for the distinctive landmarks. The SRU's job is to handle the dangerous work that the regular police are not



equipped for – hostage events, bombs, the capture of armed offenders, and if necessary marksman (sniper) work. They are superbly equipped, well trained, and well coordinated. Each episode shows them at work as a unit rather than individuals. When I started watching the series, I was struck by two points – the individual officers each had a (realistic) personality, and they each had a home life. The home life particularly shows up well at the end of a grueling event, when the whole pace of the episode changes as the officer gets home. Even the music slows down and becomes more peaceful. I must compliment Amin Bhatia and Ari Posner for their brief but haunting theme. It is so un-police like, and highlights the peaceful start to whatever the day has to bring.

Another surprise was how well the actors fitted into their roles from the first episode. Often it takes a few episodes before their characters settle down, but for them all to fit in so quickly shows good scripting and great acting ability. Enrico Colantoni as the squad's supervisor and negotiator has one of the best parts. Another strong point in the scripts is that the victims/criminals often get equal time, and as their character develops you are forced to ask yourself if this person is really bad, or just a victim of circumstances gone terribly wrong. The episode where a distraught father holds a city hospital operating theatre staff at gunpoint so his daughter can receive her promised transplant is a case in point. I was as much on his side as with the police by the end of that episode.

The series was a success when it aired in Canada, New Zealand and the U.S. CTV and CBS funded another 18-episode season that only recently began showing. The show has also started airing in Britain. In Australia the Nine Network made a complete mess of it, showing it late at night and out of order. They then cancelled it, leaving this DVD release as the only way we will see it in Australia. Well done and thank you for bringing it back to us, Hopscotch.

Normally I avoid TV to DVD series like the plague. In too many cases the short format means that many of the basic principles of drama must be left out to fit in the ads. This series, however, uses the one hour format to put back the quality into the scripts and characterizations. It has few of the special effects so common in U.S. shows, just good plots, good scripts, good acting, and a human touch that sets it apart.

The Girl who Leapt through Time
Madman Entertainment
R4 DVD

Genre: Animated Sci-Fi Drama Romance and Comedy

Rating: PG

Reviewers: Jeremy & Renata Kong

The Girl who leapt through Time was directed by Mamoru Hosoda with Yasutaka Tsutsui writing the novel and Satoko Okudera the screenplay.

As the title suggests, this Japanese anime is about a girl who discovers, through a traumatic event, that she is able to leap through time. At first Makoto uses this gift for frivolous reasons, however, she eventually begins to realise that the changes she makes can have undesired effects. While time leaping is a key part to the story, the real theme is about growing up, love, and accepting what comes your way in your life rather than trying to avoid situations.

17 year old tom-boy Makoto and her two best friends, Chiaki and Kousuke, are the main characters. The three friends attend the same high school classes, regularly play baseball and hang out together, to the point that both Chiaki and Kousuke show romantic interest in Makoto. Makoto, however, likes her friendship just the way it is and is too fearful to even consider if she has feelings for either boy.

Just a warning note: something that was off-putting and confusing was the frequency with which the 'romantic interests' in Makoto's life called her "stupid" or made derogatory com-

ments about her. This could be a cultural difference, or a translation issue, but it certainly didn't sit comfortably with me. It came across as a lack of respect for her, despite the fact that they 'loved' her.



That said, the movie is entertaining and an especially good anime. The animation is magnificent: the background scenery is so beautifully detailed and the characters are all very slender and willowy - although the effect of this is lessened with the main character Makoto because she is tremendously clumsy and falls over a lot! The character's expressions and movements are quite lifelike - thankfully Mamoru Hosoda keeps a pretty tight rein on his desire to create over the top caricatured emotions on faces (like those he uses in the childrens' animations One Piece and Digimon).

As the movie progresses the plot gets more and more complex, and while the twists can be quite surprising and interesting, it can also be a bit confusing. If you like your movies all sewn up with every question answered then this film is guaranteed to annoy the hell out of you. But if you can suspend disbelief and choose your own way of "answering the unanswered", then you will find it very enjoyable.



If you like anime, then this is a very good one to watch - but I warn you that it is a little bit perplexing.

The Girl who leapt through Time has received many awards including "2007 Best Animation Film" at the Japanese Academy Awards and Mainichi Film Concours Awards, and "2006 Special Award" at the Hochi Film Awards; and others.

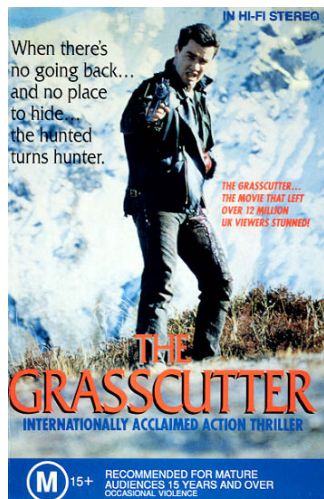
The Grasscutter
Finlayson Brewer
Productions
1988
23rd Century DVD
(U.K.)

The Grasscutter is a fine example of intelligent and character driven New Zealand Cinema. It takes a very different view of the strife in Ireland focusing on Protestant terrorism in the form of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the involvement of the English government in the mix. The Ulster Volunteer Force is run by Jack Mcready, who presents himself as the face of Protestant nationalism but is really a violent and sadistic thug. He not only enjoys torturing those he decides to kill and has even raped and impregnated his own sister.

A member of the Ulster Force has had enough; he has seen too much pain and suffering. Worse, he is in love with Claire, Mcready's sister and is shocked to learn she was raped by her own brother, the Force's leader.

After much thought, he turns police informer and is used by the British government to lock away the majority of the Ulster Force. They offer him a new name, relocation to New Zealand and a small stipend to live on. His wife cannot live with the fact that he turned against his own people, regardless of what they did, and they have separated. Deeds has a new partner but misses his children. It is a long way from Belfast and he has nearly forgotten about his past except for occasional run-in with his ex-wife over the children and the fact she likes to remind him of what she perceives as his betrayal of the Irish people.

However, things rapidly change when Billy, his eldest son decides to return to Belfast. His wife receives a devastating phone call advising her that Billy has been killed and she is sure it was the voice of Jack Macready. More frightening, the call came did not originate from Ireland but from within New Zealand, she realizes their time may be up. Deed's past now catches up with him as Mcready seeks him out to get revenge. What Brian does not know is Macready has an ace up his sleeve, Billy is not dead but working



with Macready as he has been convinced him that his real father died in prison and that Brian is a traitor to the cause. He has no idea of the truth as his mother has kept the past from the young man who had only recently turned twenty.

Macready begins by having Billy place explosives in Deed's apartment, while Deeds escapes; it kills his Maori offside and alerts the police to a major problem on their doorsteps. It seems the problems of Belfast have made it to Dunedin. Soon we are treated to a range of excellent stunts, car chases and confrontations – these have an authentic feel and are very different from Hollywood stunts.

There is an insightful sub-plot about the duplicity of the English, who are unwilling to do anything even in the face of the death of innocent New Zealanders caused by dropping Ireland's problems on their doorstep. This theme is continued right to the end of the theme and adds an extra dimension to the plot.

The acting is solid, the cinematography excellent and the action well sustained. It is a good mixture of thriller, action and drama. The climax is unexpected and poignant, reflecting on how the Irish problem was not just as political battle, but one that effected real lives and real people.

The Grasscutter also includes lots of great photography of New Zealand especially Dunedin and Queenstown, perhaps a bit too much ! At times it feels a little too tourist like showing off every possible location, but that it is very small quibble and the film makers had to get funding somehow and if that was the cost, it was a small one.

This is a surprising film and really worth searching for. Sadly the only DVD release is a very low budget title from 23rd Century in the U.K, it is a region 0 DVD. The picture is watchable but marred by lots of problems including a constant interference band over the bottom of the screen – it has been clearly ported direct from a video-tape without any work whatsoever. The sound, however, is surprisingly clear, especially considering the low quality of the picture. While this is not a particularly good way to see the film it is the only one presently available and well worth the effort. Regardless of the quality of the DVD, I found **The Grasscutter** a riveting work of cinema and one that had not dated much at all since it was made in 1988.

Idiots and Angels

Bill Plympton

Web: <http://www.plymptoons.com>

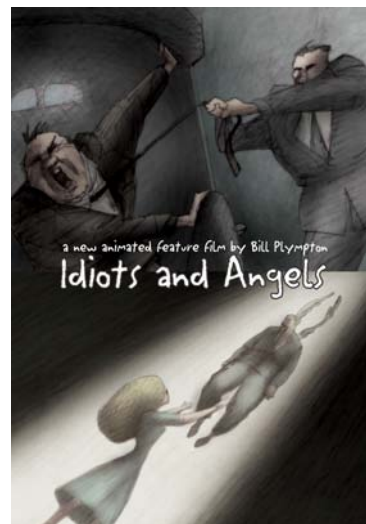
Bill Plympton is a highly celebrated cartoonist and animator but it has been a long journey. In 1968 Plympton began his studies at the School of Visual Arts in New York where he made his home. Plympton served a long tenure as an illustrator and cartoonist. Between expanding his ever increasing portfolio he designed the magazines: Cineaste, Filmmakers Newsletter, and Film Society Review. His illustrations have graced the pages of The New York Times, Vogue, House Beautiful, The Village Voice, Screw, and Vanity Fair. His cartoons appeared in such magazines as Viva, Penthouse, Rolling Stone, National Lampoon, and Glamour. In 1975 he began "Plympton," a political cartoon strip which was published by The Soho Weekly News. By 1981 its syndication was reaching some twenty major newspapers.

At the same time Plympton was not simply satisfied with cartoons, he wanted to go further and explore animation. In 1983 Valeria Wasilewski asked Plympton to work on a film she was producing of Jules Feiffer's song "**Boomtown**." Connie D'Antuono, another of the film's producers helped him learn the ropes.

Following the completion of "**Boomtown**," he began his own animated film, "**Drawing Lesson**



2." Production of the live action scenes was slow, due to inclement weather, so Plympton decided to start on another film. He contacted an old friend Maureen McElheron with whom he had performed in a Country Western Band. She agreed to your score and sing. "**Your Face**" won a 1988 Oscar nomination for best animation.



His work started to appear regularly at animation festivals and MTV. His short films such as "**How to Kiss**" and "**25 Ways to Quit Smoking**" were highly successful. His "**Microtoons**" were specially successful on MTV. He also excelled at advertising including a unique take on Trivial Pursuit.

The Tune was his first full-length feature and fully self financed. Sections of the feature were released as short films to help generate funds for the ongoing production. These included "**The Wiseman**" and "**Push Comes to Shove**," the latter of which won the 1991 Prix du Jury at the Cannes Film Festival. The Tune made the rounds of the film festivals, garnering the prestigious Houston WorldFest Gold Jury Special Award as well as a Spirit Award nomination for Best Film Score.

After personally drawing and coloring 30,000 cels for The Tune, Plympton moved to live-action. **J. Lyle**, his first live-action feature, is a wacky, surreal comedy about a sleazy lawyer who meets a magical talking dog that changes his life. This was followed by **Guns on the Clackamas**, a behind-the-scenes look at an imaginary disastrous Western which was shot in Oregon and New York.

In 1998, Bill completed another animated feature, titled **I married a Strange Person**, a strangely heart warming tale of a newlywed couple on their wedding night. Grant, the husband, starts experiencing strange, supernatural powers and Kerry, his wife, can't cope. Whenever Grant thinks of something, it becomes reality, yet he doesn't know where these magical



The beginning of Wings...

powers come from. Once again Bill Plympton single-handedly drew and financed this project - only this time it's for adults and very politically incorrect.

Bill's next animated feature, **Mutant Aliens**, the story of a stranded astronaut returning to Earth after 20 years in space, was completed in January 2001 and premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. It won Grand Prix in Annecy 2001 and was released in theatres in 2002. This was followed by **Hair High**, a gothic '50s high-school comedy about a love-triangle that goes terribly wrong.

Bill's short film **Guard Dog** was been a hit at film festivals and it brought Bill his second Oscar nomination in January 2005. He has recently completed a sequel called **Hot Dog**.

His newest film is **Idiots and Angels**.

Plympton describes the background to the film..."The first recollection I have of the concept was an event in 2005, when I was walking with

Reluctant Angel



a student at the Lille Short Film Festival in France, and he asked me what my next feature would be about. I declared, off-handedly, that it would be about an angel who didn't want his wings, and as we discussed the idea, I really got to like the concept. That night, in my hotel room, I started to explore the dramatic possibilities of a reluctant angel.

At that point, I had just finished production on "**Hair High**", and although I thought it was a great film and would make me rich, it was a very difficult production - so, I decided that "**Idiots and Angels**" would be the exact opposite of "**Hair High**".

While "**Hair High**" was bright and colorful and fully animated, "**Idiots**" would be monochromatic and more limited in its animation. While "**Hair High**" had big-name actors providing voices, "**Idiots**" would only have music and sound effects, no dialogue at all.

Because of that, I wanted music to play throughout - almost like a long opera - or an extended string of music videos. My recent short film "**Shuteye Hotel**" was a short rehearsal, an experiment done in the new style of "**Idiots and Angels**", a dark and surreal Eastern European look."

"**Idiots and Angels**" is a uniquely dark and reflective animated film. Angel is a selfish, abusive, morally bankrupt man who hangs out at his local bar, berating the other patrons.

One day, Angel mysteriously wakes up with a pair of wings on his back. The wings make him do good deeds, contrary to his nature.

He desperately tries to rid himself of the good wings, doing everything from bolting them down to attacking them with a chainsaw but they still work their magic.

But the world is a dark place and others believe his wings are a ticket to fame and fortune and soon he must face off against them. This is a must see dark animated fairy tale for adults.

The I Inside Disney R4 DVD

The I Inside is based on a screenplay called "Point of Death" by co-screenwriter Michael Cooney and is an intriguing exploration of memory, love, family squabbles and death.



Hollywood heart-throb Ryan Phillippe plays wealthy heir Simon Cable who wakes up in hospital bed to find he had been clinically dead for some minutes and has a form of amnesia. He believes it is sometime in the year 2000 and that he is single and yet the doctor tells him it is 2002 and that his wife is outside.

He does not recognize his wife and she seems more than suspicious in her behaviour and attitude, certainly she is unsympathetic. He also discovers he had a mistress. He is told his brother died in a car accident some years before but he cannot remember that event either.

As he is given various tests he finds that things do not fit together and becomes increasingly paranoid experiencing strange flashes of memory which seem terribly real. Soon these flashes become so real that he can walk around and experience them as "reality".

Simon tries to piece together his life but cannot

Ryan Phillippe in The I Inside



ascertain whether this is all an elaborate attempt to trick information out of him (he has some doubts about his own role in his brother's death) or whether he really can move through time.

Simon finally comes to the realization that rather than being flashbacks that he is actually moving between the same hospital in the year 2000 (where he was hospitalized for a car accident and the suspicious death of his brother) and the present where he had landed after a potential poisoning. It also seems that what he does in the past has an effect on the present but when he tries to change the past it has unexpected and sometimes devastating effects on the present.

The first thing you notice about **The I Inside** is the beauty of the cinematography, it looks absolutely superb. Hospital rooms meld into others from years before and after, landscapes fold from one location to another – the fluidity with which the scenes change is quite breathtaking. The filming really creates the sense that we perceive as real could just as easily be illusion and that nothing we see on screen can be trusted. This creates a real sense of confusion about what exactly is happening and exactly what is happening.

This is a deliberately puzzling film, it refuses to allow you to really pinpoint what is occurring until the very end and even then you will have some doubts and many unanswered questions.

I would have preferred a little more meaning to the film; at times it reminds me too much of such other trick films as *The Sixth Sense* and *The Village*, when you know the secret the film loses its potency and becomes impossible to really enjoy a second time.

At the same time it is still an interesting film - intelligent, stylish, beautifully filmed and superbly acted with brilliant performances from Ryan Phillippe, Stephen Rea and others. Ryan Phillippe is a real stand out, having moved from teen idol to quite a substantial actor who is capable of carrying off a psychologically demanding role.

This is not your run of the mill psychological thriller and will certainly keep you scratching your head to the very end.

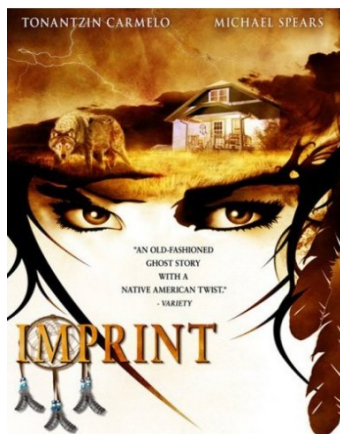
Imprint
MTI Home Video
2009
Director Michael
Linn, Producer
Chris Eyre
R1 DVD

Reviewer: Bob
Estreich

This film is variously described as horror or thriller. It is really neither. It is a supernatural mystery story, verging on the mystical, with a Native American touch. If you are a fan of blood and gore, you will not find it here.

Shayla Stonefeather (the brilliant and beautiful Tonantzin Carmelo), a prosecuting attorney, has just completed a case where a young lad has been found guilty of murder. Coincidentally he comes from the same reservation that she left years ago. Shayla returns to the reservation to be with her dying father, who is bedridden and almost catatonic. In her first night in the house she hears noises that lead her to think that the locals are taking revenge on her for the prosecution. Night by night the noises get worse and she starts to see ghostly figures and flashes of inexplicable but terrible scenes. Being a modern girl, she has abandoned the old myths and legends of her tribe and she struggles for a more believable answer to the mysteries. She also receives daily visits from a wolf which appears unafraid of her, and a horse which seems to prefer her company.

A wise Indian elder and medicine man, played with tremendous authority and gentleness by Dave Bald Eagle, explains to her that she is receiving contacts from spirits. They have no sense of time – to them past and present and



future is all the same. He says she must learn to listen to what they are trying to tell her, since she is the only one to whom the messages are directed.

Shayla finally accepts his explanation and sets out to listen to the message. Once Shayla accepts her heritage the story starts to drop into place. The spirits appear to be telling her about a family tragedy when her father caught her brother and his homosexual lover. Although the two were believed to have left town, it appears from the spirit message that her father killed them. The location of their missing motorbike is revealed to her, which confirms that the spirits are showing her the truth. Now she has received the message, what can she do about it? It soon becomes apparent that some of the message refers to the future, not the past, and some of it is terrifying. One of the flashes is of a hanging female – who will it be? And what is the significance of the wolf and horse? Are they the spirits of her brother and his friend? Whose side are they on?

Director Michael Linn has produced a beautiful film, from the rather harsh beauty of the Colorado plains to the rich colours of the local artistic handiwork. He has softened the horror approach and produced a thoroughly believable film that treats the Native American legends and culture with respect instead of the usual bloodthirsty splatter.

Even so, it is hard to imagine the story carrying much credibility without the skill of Dave Bald Eagle, whose performance, even in his minor part as tribal elder, makes the legends credible. It's an old writer's technique to have a minor actor explain the thread of the coming story, but I have rarely seen it played with such skill and compassion. In fact all the actors are absolutely perfect in their roles. Few have much film work behind them except Carmelo, but all turn in absolutely first class performances. It is quite revealing to see a ghost story based sympathetically around the Native American culture and featuring their people. Linn has been quoted as saying "I feel that the Native perspective elevates the genre above the norm, and using indigenous actors heightens the credibility of the subject matter." He is absolutely right.

MTI is an independent producer and this year they celebrate their 25th anniversary. This film will only enhance their reputation.



In Bruges
Icon Entertainment
R4 DVD
Blu Ray and DVD

Release date:
11th March 2009

In Bruges is a very unique sort of film, it is a thriller, dark comedy and ultimately a tragedy, it keeps you watching every moment due to the depth of its character development, plot twists and witty and incisive dialogue.



The story opens somewhat like a travel guide to Bruges (which is in Belgium), it is beautifully shot and filled with superb images evoking the Medieval history of the city. Into this ancient township come two hit men from Dublin, sent to escape the heat after a hit had gone terribly wrong. Ken is a seasoned hitman (played by Brendan Gleeson), experienced, cold but somewhat jaded. He is also well educated and enjoys the art, history and Churches of Bruges.

The other is Ray (played by Colin Farrell), he is hot headed and aggressive and lacks self control. He finds Bruges annoying and irritating and is the cause of their temporary exile, he accidentally shot a child on his first kill. Ken has a father like affection for Ray and sees how his own life has been destroyed by his work and tries to "herd" Ray into safer pursuits, but trouble also

Ken and Ray from In Bruges



seems to find Ray wherever he goes.

Ken and Ray work for Harry, a violent if not psychopathic crime lord. During most of the film we only experience Harry via the phone and abusive messages. When he arrives we find a nervous and edgy Ralph Fiennes. It seems that Harry has not just sent them to Bruges for a holiday, he wants Ken to kill Ray as in his line of work it is unacceptable to kill a child even by accident. When Ken refuses, a chain of events begin which will have dire consequences for them all.

The film spends a lot of time developing the characters Ken and Ray and they are superbly portrayed, even for killers you find yourself surprisingly sympathetic. Both have their own quirks and the fascinating conversations they have create the incredible dialogue which is throughout the film. There are also so many unusual support characters from a drug addled Dwarf to local prostitutes, Ray's love interest Chloe (who is a drug dealer) and her punk boyfriend and Yuri, a strange gun dealer.

In Bruges is a hard film to describe, it sounds violent and nihilistic and in many ways it is, yet it is also filled with incredible dark humour, bizarre situations and some of the funniest dialogue you will have heard in a while.

At the same time the film slowly moves inevitably towards a very bleak climax. The end is powerful and incredibly tragic; it is amazing how all the threads of the film are brought together in an finale which is moving and poignant.

What is quite amazing is that this is the first feature film by Martin McDonagh, whose previous plays have been highly respected in England and Ireland. **In Bruges** brings together an incredible use of dialogue with a deep understanding of human nature, it is witty, brutal, funny and sad, so often the humour is self deprecating and filled with dark and cynical reflections on life.

The sheer rollercoaster of emotions that this film evokes is astounding, you will laugh one minute, be shocked the next and finally cry as the film ends as each character is brought to face the consequences of their choices.

This is truly incredible cinema and a must see film.

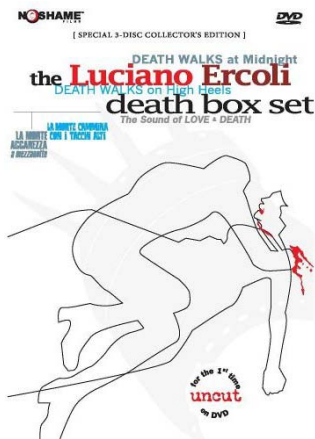
**The Luciano
Ercoli Death Box
Set
R0 NTSC
NoShame Films**

Luciano Ercoli was a writer, producer and director popular through the Sixties and Seventies. He only ever directed a small number of Giallo films, but each of these are marked by his unique interpretation of the genre. Giallo, which could be loosely defined as Italian crime and thriller cinema. It includes a wide variety of interpretations from the brutal violence of Dario Argento to the exploitation films of Sergio Martino. Ercoli takes a different approach and offers finely tuned thrillers with an emphasis on plot, character development and red herrings. At the same time he never forgets the significance of the look of the film and offers beautiful cinematography, stunning women and unusual murders.

Death Walks at Midnight is based on a script by spaghetti western author Sergio Corbucci. It is hip, twisted and lots of fun with a very cool Euro soundtrack. Valentina is a beautiful model who wants to make some extra cash. She agrees to help her part time lover Gio, who works as a newspaper reporter, with a lead story. She is injected with a new type of psychedelic and he is to record her experiences. She only agrees on the condition that her face is covered by a tasteful mask but as soon as she is high, the mask is off and the photography begins. There is nothing better than a beautiful model high on drugs for the front page of a sleazy newspaper.

At first the trip is rather fun with loads of colour, laughter and visions. Soon all this changes, she is horrified to "see" a killer in dark glasses subduing a woman and then killing her with a large spiked metal glove. He hits her repeatedly in the face until she is well and truly dead. At first Valentina and Gio think this is just a hallucination, but soon they realize that she had seen a real murder and that the killer thinks she knows his identity. As they try and unravel the story of the killing, they find the police less than helpful and more bodies turning up by the day.

Death Walks at Midnight is an interesting Giallo marked by excellent storytelling, unusual



killings and a real cat and mouse plot. There are lots of potential killers and it is not until the very end that you work out the story – it is definitely different than you would expect but not beyond the realm of probability. Unlike other Giallo's Ercoli keeps the story real and it has more in common with a crime thriller than the more "sex and violence" films at the other end of the spectrum.

Death Walks on High Heels is also very different from the traditional Giallo, in many ways it wanders through murder and crime and becomes a more Hitchcock type thriller by the time it has finished. It is another example of Ercoli's superb storytelling, while it is a very complex plot and is difficult to interpret until the very end, it does make sense and is very challenging cinema. Ercoli avoids the vagueness that marks many other Giallos and creates a story which can be deciphered if you watch closely.

Nicole Rochard is a stripper and her father is a thief well known to the police. She is shocked to find that he has been murdered during a train journey. The police believe that the murderer wanted to recover sound highly valuable diamonds of which he was a courier. Sometime later Nicole is attacked by a masked man and urged to give over the diamonds or tell him where they are.

She suspects that the attacker maybe her boyfriend Michel Aumont and hightails it to London with a married British doctor with whom she is having an affair. They spent some weeks together in passionate bliss until the doctor's wife intervenes and wanting her hubbie back offers to pay Nicole to leave England. When she declines she is found murdered and the doctor is shot while in his clinic. The story becomes more complicated as the suspects all have alibis. A short time later the doctor's wife is also killed and the police have no leads whatsoever.

Once again Ercoli has created an intricate tale with a complex storyline, beautiful women and superb cinematography. While Ercoli is happy to use attractive actresses and violent murders, he again avoids any extremes and instead offers a tale marked by plot and character development.

While this set can be difficult to find, it is worth the effort. It is superbly presented with excellent quality transfers, a full colour informative booklet (with some lovely poster images) and a third disc including music by Stelvio Cipriani who scored **Death Walks on High Heels**.

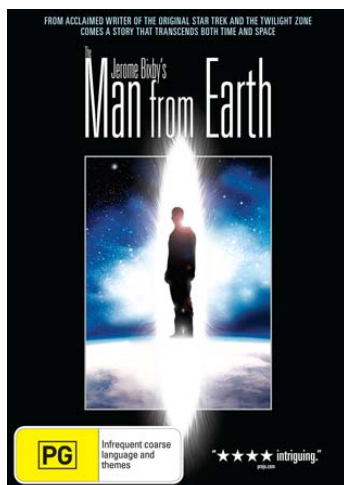
Man from Earth Anchor Bay R4 DVD

Jerome Bixby was a celebrated author whose television credits included the "Mirror, Mirror" and "Day of the Dove" episodes of *Star Trek* and the "It's a Good Life" episode of *The Twilight Zone*. He also conceived and co-wrote the celebrated 1966 film *Fantastic Voyage*. The *Man from Earth* was originally conceived by Bixby in the 1960's but not completed until the last months before his death in 1998. After his demise his son tirelessly worked to bring it to the big screen and this film is the result and what a superb film it is.

College professor John Oldman has unexpectedly decided to move on, he has a great career and love on the cards but for some undisclosed reason he is loading his pick-up truck and preparing to leave. He is interrupted by a small group of friends primarily made up of fellow academics, since he tried to escape a going away party they have decided to bring it to him. While John is a respected and loved academic, he lives in an isolated Cabin and seems to have a very different approach to life than those around him. He lives with minimal possessions and seems to like the "natural" life.

As his friends help him pack away his possessions they are a little startled to notice what looks like a genuine yet unknown Van Gogh, a rare bow and arrow and a late Cro-Magnon flint tool. As the whisky and conversation flows all of them are intrigued about John's unexpected departure and his evasiveness about his life and where he is going next. For someone close to his friends he seems unwilling to even tell them where he is going and what he plays to do.

After some deliberation John asks them a fascinating yet strange question "What if a man from the upper Palaeolithic survived until the present day?" At first it seems just like a hypothetical debate to have with some boozy academic friends and they discuss it from the angle of biology, anthropology and history. However, suddenly John moves the discussion into the first person and they realize he is seriously talking



about himself.

John reveals he is 14,000 years old and has lived in a vast number of countries and communities. He learned early that to stay too long was dangerous as his lack of aging gave him away, so to minimize risk he would move every ten years. He begins to explain to them his experience of life and slowly but surely each one of his guests become challenged, frightening, awestruck, or in one case, emotionally distraught. One of his guests becomes so concerned about John's mental condition that he invites a psychiatrist friend in on the discussion.

There are no special abilities or awesome god-like powers, John uses his intelligence to challenge and confront those around him. He not only explains his experience of prehistory but his personal apprenticeship to the Buddha and his later life being the basis for the "Jesus" myth.

The sheer intelligence and erudition of the script is breathtaking. It is witty, interesting and above all shows a brilliant knowledge of history, religion, mythology and psychology. The mixture of guests including a psychiatrist, religious believer, an open minded academic, an anthropologist and so on, allows the film to reflect on various reactions to John's tale.

Man from Earth is a powerful film, yet clearly low budget. It has been essentially filmed in one cabin with minimal props and no special effects. The acting is superb and each of the characters are totally believable. It is really quite an achievement to create such a fascinating film with a group of people having a conversation.

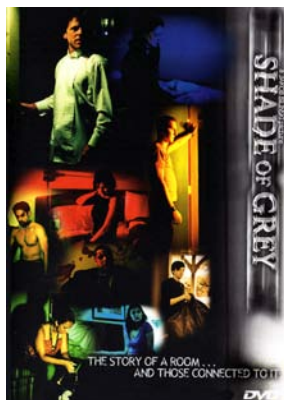
The climax of the film is totally unexpected, as John recants to save his guests their sanity and each of them leaves, the psychiatrist hears John talking with a young girl about his various lives and names. Suddenly the psychiatrist releases that John was his father, a father who left when he was very young, just like John was describing. Suddenly faced with undeniable proof of John's immortality, he dies of a heart attack and John is again reminded of the cost of living forever.

The Man from Earth is startling Science Fiction, filled with thought provoking ideas and some of the best dialogue I have heard in a long time.

Shade of Grey
Jakob Bilinski
Cinephreak Pictures
2008

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

We have seen Jakob Bilinski's earlier work in films like **Concentric** and **37 West** (reviewed in Synergy earlier this year) and his growing expertise is impressive. In this recent film, Bilinski has produced something completely different from his previous dark action style.

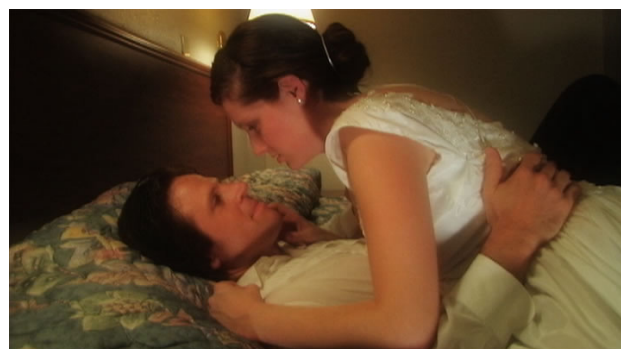


The film revolves around the happenings of a series of people who, for one reason or another, briefly occupy one ordinary room of an ordinary motel. As each person's life passes through the room we see the love, hate, betrayal, lust and crime, and their effects on the others around them. It is rather voyeuristic, as we only get the shortest glimpse of their lives and their problems and must fill in the rest from our imaginations.

It is presented as a series of segments, not always in chronological order, showing the development of the people and their relationships. These are often decaying and some end in trauma. There is nothing inherently evil about the room itself – it is simply a tiny stage where little segments of human drama are played out.

We see some people rise above their weaknesses, some give in to them, some die from them.

The only unchanging feature is the room itself. It is only at the very end that we have a glimpse outside the room, and at that point a new couple begins their segment of the continuing story.



Cinephreak Pictures

<http://www.cinephreakpictures.com/>

<http://www.cinephreakpictures.com/shadeofgrey/index.html>

The film was written, produced, directed and edited by Jakob Bilinski. His work becomes more professional with each new film, and this one reflects his maturing style from action drama to human drama. Once again I see a few other Bilinskis in the credits, so it looks like Cinephreak is becoming a family affair.

The photography is by Chris Wilkerson, who does a magnificent job changing the whole atmosphere of the room simply by subtle lighting and angle changes according to the mood of each segment.

In spite of this, he keeps it identifiably the same room. I must particularly compliment Edward Hatfield and Paul Grajek, who did the sound. Recording in a small motel room with its echoes and confined spaces, accompanied by a film crew, must have been a nightmare, but their work is superb. Some of the rehearsal shots on the website show just how crowded it became.

It's hard to pick out any actor or actress who is better than the others – they all play their parts well, especially for unknowns. Their skills lift this film from the ordinary low-budget flick to something higher and more intriguing.

For an independent producer, Bilinski and Cinephreak are producing very professional films. It shows what you can do when originality and skill overcome the restrictions of a tight budget.

I think this film could become a classic human drama, and if this is your style of film I recommend you have a look at it.

←TEN INCH HERO→

Unrated Version
Brave New Films
R1 DVD

Web: <http://www.teninchherosales.com/>
Rating: MA (Sex & Nudity, Mild violence)

Reviewers: Jeremy & Renata Kong

Ten Inch Hero is an independent romance comedy directed by David Mackay and written by Betsy Morris. It stars Jensen Ackles, Sean Patrick Flaner, Clea DuVall, Danneel Harris, Elisabeth Harnoi, John Doe and Alice Krige.

OK, if you judge it by the title you might think that this could be one of those try-hard-to-be-funny American frat movies, but it is not. Sure, it has its fair share of dick jokes, but the movie is so much more than sandwiches and sex.

The story revolves around the lives of the people who work in a sandwich diner (aka heroes, or subs), in Santa Cruz CA, and it deals mainly with the theme of love and outward appearances. The delightful main characters are a young woman who has come to town in search of the child she had to give up for adoption years earlier; a Baptist's daughter who is a computer-nerd-virgin and also has an on-line romance; and an apparently 'old hippie' who owns the diner and harbours a deep unrequited love.

**Sean Patrick Flanery and Adair Tishler in
 Ten Inch Hero**



There is also the punk with the cynical attitude and the obvious crush on the beautiful girl (Jensen Ackles - now how can you go wrong with him in a movie!?). Of course there is also the beautiful girl, who is shallow and unashamedly easy.

Ten Inch Hero is well acted, the characters are interesting, the dialogue is intelligent and witty, and it has a great soundtrack, too. The moral of the story comes out very clear and simple - if not a little bit (ok a lot) predictable - but everyone, even the most cynical of people, should be won over by it.

If you loved **Love Actually** you'll definitely love this movie. It takes the **Love Actually** approach and makes it rather ruder. Here you actually get to see boobs, and even a young guys arse!

It's heart warming, laugh out loud funny, and everything comes good in the end.

So it's not Schindler's List, but not every movie has to be. It's the best bit of light-hearted entertainment we've seen in a long time. We totally enjoyed this movie .

PS Guys... if you want a sure thing movie to win your girl over - This is it!!!

Extras include:

Cast and Crew Interviews
 Behind the Scenes Footage
 In the Studio: Recording Original Songs
 The Trailer
 Deleted Scene
 Outtakes
 and a Commentary by Director/Producer David Mackay and Producer Mark Witsken.



Trial & Retribution: Season 5
Acorn Media
R2 DVD
3 Disc Set

Trial & Retribution has been a huge success on ITV, while many crime series have gone by the wayside, this one has proved to be one of the most creative and innovative crime dramas on the market.

Written by the highly respected TV crime and thriller writer Lynda La Plante, **Trial & Retribution** is marked by a highly engaging plot, constant suspense, superb character development and some very dark, confronting and downright disturbing crimes.

Season five includes four superb episodes: Rules of the Game, Kill the King, Conviction, The Box and Trial & Retribution.

Trial & Tribulation is intelligent crime drama mixing unique cases each episode with an ongoing story which includes solid character development. The crimes are credible and believable and avoid some of the trends in US crime drama towards plots which are so convoluted that they lack authenticity.

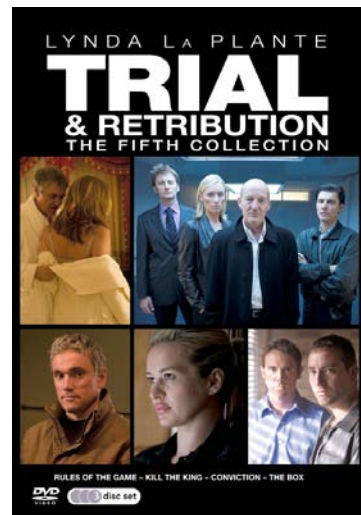
At the same time the characters have complex background and come across as real people working to solve crimes as well as dealing with their own lives, relationships and difficulties.

The Trial & Tribulation team has worked together for some ten years solving confronting and disturbing crimes. They include DCS Michael Walker who is a rather old world detective and works with memories of a very dark past (David Hayman – **The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas**). The driven and ambitious DCI Roisin Connor (Victoria Smurfit – **About a Boy**) and DS Satchell (Dorian Lough – **Notting Hill**). They are joined by two new team members DI Moira Lynch (Kerry Fox – **Intimacy**) and DI Jack Mullins (David O'Hara – **The Departed**).

Together this team must piece together crimes which will confront and shock; they are crimes of violence, passion, revenge and at times, savagery.

They will push the boundaries of not only the team but the audience as each episode shows the team working against all odds to solve each crime and make sure justice is served.

The Rules of the Game opens so simply, an abandoned piece of luggage is found in an airport car park. However, it all takes on a very sinister turn as the naked body of a young girl is found inside. On the hottest day of the year, the team must get to the bottom of this terrible crime overcoming not only the weather but the troublesome involvement of a powerful Ukrainian millionaire which requires very careful handling as his position could have political ramifications.



When a well known paediatric surgeon and close friend of DCS Walker Professor Jonathan Carlisle, is found dead, DCI Connor uncovers an unresolved medical conflict arising from death of a young girl during surgery. Was Professor Carlisle's mistake in theatre enough to make someone take matters into their own hands and want to Kill The King?

Terry Dyers returns to an East London council estate after spending time in jail for a crime he didn't commit. He may not be the best of people but he is an innocent man and wants to find the truth about the murder which he has been nailed with.

As DCI Conner takes command of the team in Conviction he finds secrets which many would prefer lay buried and these lead to a thrilling tale of injustice, revenge and tragedy.

In The Box DCS Walker returns home to Glasgow to investigate the death of the wife of Kevin Reid, a man with a criminal past and dark ties to his brother Ronnie. The police are convinced that Kevin and Ronnie must be involved in her death. Can the truth be unearthed before the truth it is permanently buried?

This is a superb series includes four full length hard-hitting double episodes and offers some of the best crime drama you will see in a superb 3 disc set.

WALL-E
Disney Entertainment
R4 DVD
Single and Double DVD
as well as Blu Ray
Releases

Genre: Animated family
adventure comedy
Rating: G

Reviewers: Jeremy
& Renata Kong



WALL-E is a Pixar Studio production, directed by Andrew Stanton. The writer was Andrew Stanton & Pete Docter, while the screenplay was written by Andrew Stanton & Jim Reardon.

It won the Oscar for "Best Animated Feature Film of the Year" and has also won numerous other awards as well.

WALL-E is a heart warming tale of a strange little robot. The earth has been abandoned for 700 years due to toxicity from the level of garbage left from humans' consumerist society. The humans have just up and moved into space to live on a giant ship called the Axiom.

The WALL-E version robots were left behind in a bid to clean up the earth (they are basically mobile garbage crushers) however, all but our hero have broken down. WALL-E is left alone to continue his work. His survival is due to the development of his quirky personality and curiosity about humanity.

The humans regularly send out probes (EVE) to search for sustainable life on planets. EVE is sent to check earth, and meets WALL-E. It is through their friendship that WALL-E embarks on an amazing adventure that could save humanity.

When I initially saw this at the cinema with my kids, I thought it was "pleasant" but it took me a long time to connect



with the characters, and I found the lack of dialogue for most of the movie was a bit irritating. However, when it was released to DVD and we watched it many, many, many (!) times again we found so many more levels to this story.

There is a lot of humour and warmth, especially in the portrayal of WALL-E & EVE. In fact, as you watch you will find that the robot characters are more human in many ways than the human society that has developed on the Axiom. You'll find this echoed in the detailed rendering of the robots and the surrounding land or space scapes versus the almost 2D look of the human characters on the Axiom. The film makers have also used some live action segments to juxtapose humanity pre and post Axiom.

On face value, it's a fun and sweet love story, with an obvious eco-friendly message, that's great for kids and parents alike. On a deeper level, it's a warning to get back to a more simple, less consumerist society in order to focus on what it really means to be human.

Make sure you stay to watch the end credits, because there is a very clever and beautifully rendered 'history of man', set to an infectious enjoyable Peter Gabriel song.

Overall, it's a very enjoyable and funny movie that kids will especially love.

Youth without Youth
Aspect 16:9
R4 DVD
Sony Pictures / Zoetrope
Directed by Francis Ford Coppola
Distributed in Australia by Hopscotch Films

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

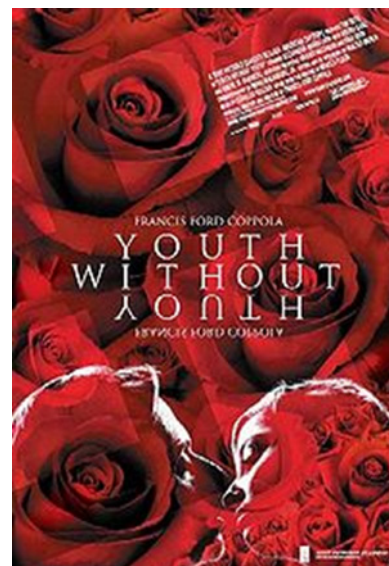
This is an odd story to classify. On the surface it is a good, interesting science fiction story, but the mystery and love story subplots make it richer and more human. Dominic Matei is an elderly Professor of Linguistics, approaching the end of his life. In 1938 he is in Romania where he is struck by a massive bolt of lightning. During his slow recovery a number of curious changes appear. His body is rejuvenating to the point of his teeth and hair regrowing, his intellect and memory have improved phenomenally, and he now appears to be about half his previous age. As he further improves, he finds his intellect is powerful enough to support a mental copy of himself that is powerful enough to have its own independent existence. This double can help him through many of the crises he now faces in life, because it understands his problems intimately but has enough independence to have a different viewpoint.

The Professor of Medicine who is dealing with his case is astounded and publishes the details. Unfortunately, with the outbreak of World War 2, the Nazis also take an interest in this mental superman. Matei must escape to Switzerland for the duration of the war and, with the help of his double, resist the advances of both the Germans and the Americans.

By the end of the war his intellect is at such a high level that he is able to predict atomic war and the other catastrophes that will befall the human race. He has a massive volume of notes and writings which he deposits in banks, hoping they will survive and help the future civilization through its mess.

With that done, he can now settle down somewhat to enjoy the rest of his life. While on a hiking trip he finds Veronica, a young lady who has also just been hit by a lightning strike. With her, the results were different. Her mind is now also occupied by the genetic memory or spirits of her past lives. Veronica reminds Dominic of a lost love from his early days, and she grows to depend on him as she tries to deal with the other minds in her head. They fall in love. Unfortunately there is a down side. Although he is 88

years old, his body has stabilized at around the mid-thirties. Veronica, however, is aging rapidly while she is around him and now appears in her late forties. Dominic must decide whether to stay and shorten her life, or leave and cause great pain to both of them.



This is Coppola's first film in around ten years. He based the film and his screenplay on a novella by author and historian Mircea Eliade, and it successfully and sympathetically ties together the three different streams of the story. Tim Roth plays Dominic with sympathy and skill, especially considering that he must depict a character at different stages of his life. His depiction of the elderly Dominic is absolutely brilliant – shuffling, slightly stooped, slower in thought. Alexandra Maria Lara as Veronica turns in a very polished performance as the girl trying to come to grips with all the extra people occupying her mind. Bruno Ganz is perfect as the sympathetic but politically aware Professor Stanculescu, who nurses Dominic through his hospital period and becomes more of a friend than a doctor.

Coppola shot the film on high-res digital, a little unusual for a director more used to conventional film. The results are excellent and often quite beautiful, especially the contrasts between the back streets of Romania, the night scenes in Switzerland, and the bright, clear lighting of Cyprus. The film has received mixed reviews, possibly because reviewers have tried to fit it into one genre as opposed to the mix of story streams that it comprises.

I found that by viewing it as science fiction with the human element overlaid, it made the film more powerful as the story elements reinforced each other. It's definitely worth seeing, if only to form your own opinion and see the master at work.



CULT DVD REVIEWS

42nd Street Forever Volume 4 R0 NTSC DVD Synapse Films

The **42nd Street** series are amazing collections of trailers from the Seventies and Eighties. The first three volume has garnered a cult following and Synapse have also released XXX adult trailer collections as well.



42nd Street Volume 4 is a great collection of trailers which cover the full gambit of genres from cult to horror, teen coming of age to epics, American Indian and historical films to crime, exploitation to sex and lots more.

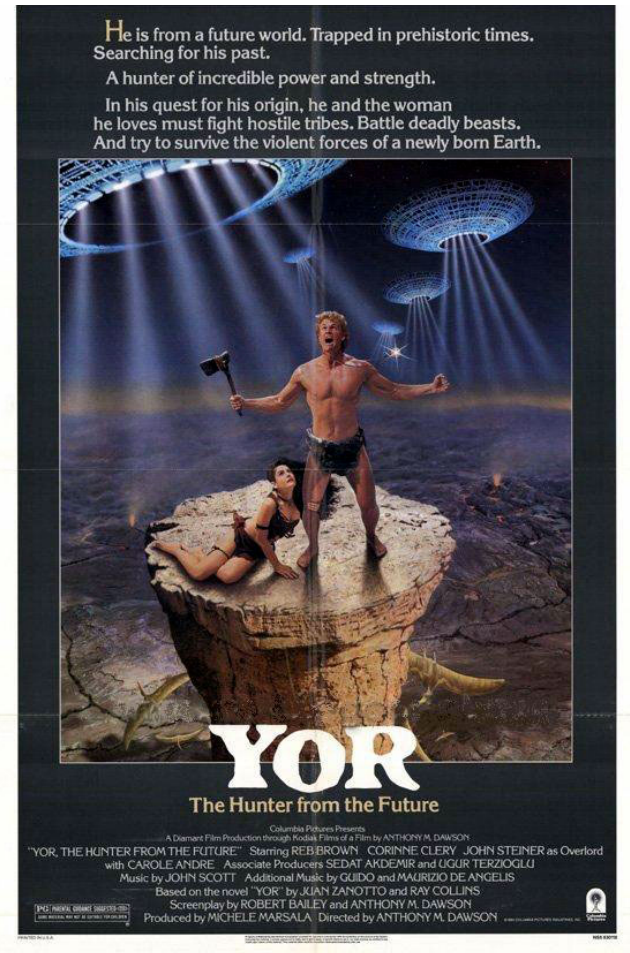
The condition of the trailers is as you would expect, scratchy and old, but this just gives them more of a "midnight movie" feel. The sound is clear and they are certainly quite watchable.

Most of these films were marketed via the trailers alone, when you saw them you wondered what all the hype was about. In so many cases the trailers were better than the films and were edited to give you the best bits (sometimes they even included scenes and content not found in the films at all !).

In the Eighties they were placed at the end of videotapes so they got you in and you could not wait to rent them and when you did you wondered why you bothered.

Who has ever heard of **Schizoid**, **Die Sister**, **Die**, **Bonnie's Kids**, **Combat Cops** or **Black-out** – the night New York's power failed ?

Of course no such collection would be complete without cult favourites and these trailers are a real joy and include such notables as **Ameri-**



cathon, Can I Do It... 'Til I Need Glasses?, the Jezebels, Simon:King of the Witches (now restored and released by Dark Sky Pictures) and **The Legend of Boggy Creek**.

There is also lots and lots of schlock including **Yor: The Hunter from the Future, Silent Scream, Mortuary** and **Humongous !**

One of the easily overlooked gems on this collection is the commentary. This features Fangoria managing editor Michael Gingold, film historian Chris Peggiali, and Edwin Samuelson of AVManiacs.com. The commentary provides a synopsis and background info on each film, a pretty amazing commentary to say the least.

There is also a small selection of made for TV trailers.

**Death Race
2000 & Death
Sport
Roger Corman
Umbrella
Entertainment
R4 DVD**

Death Race 2000 has the reputation of being one of the most classic B grade films ever made and it certainly lives up to its reputation.

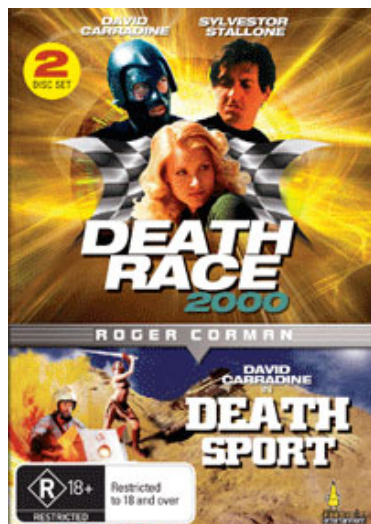
It is so utterly bizarre, outrageous and just plain ridiculous on so many levels that it is truly rip-roaring entertainment.

Made in 1975 Corman has created a very kitsch version of the future. It is the year 2000 and American has been at war with Europe forever (it especially has an issue with France) and the fascist Mr. President has been running the US (now called United Provinces of America) from abroad since 1979. Strangely the sets, cars and fashion looks like they have come out of the Seventies !

To control the population the future is focused on providing violent entertainment and sports and the focus of this is the annual "Intercontinental Race" which is a free-for -all cross country race. But this is not like any other race, you get points for everyone you run over with specific scores for children, the elderly and women.

There are five cars and drivers - "Calamity Jane" (Mary Woronov), "Matilda the Hun" (Roberta Collins), and "Nero the Hero" (Martin Kove).

The major contenders are "Machine Gun" Joe Viturbo (Sylvester Stallone) and the reigning champion "Frankenstein" (David Carradine), whose "Death Race" prowess has reached god-like propor-



tions. Each has a navigator.

The various drivers offer a diverse range of personalities from politically incorrect Nazi Aryan warriors Matilda the Hun and her dumb offside to the aggressive yet verbally challenged Joe Viturbo and the national hero Frankenstein whose body has been replaced with various synthetic parts due to accidents in the three races he has won.

Of course there is a patriotic revolt underfoot as a resistance has grown against the fascist US government and they are working to destroy the race. They have implanted a member of their team as Frankenstein's driver but soon they find things are more complicated than they thought as Frankenstein has an agenda of his own.

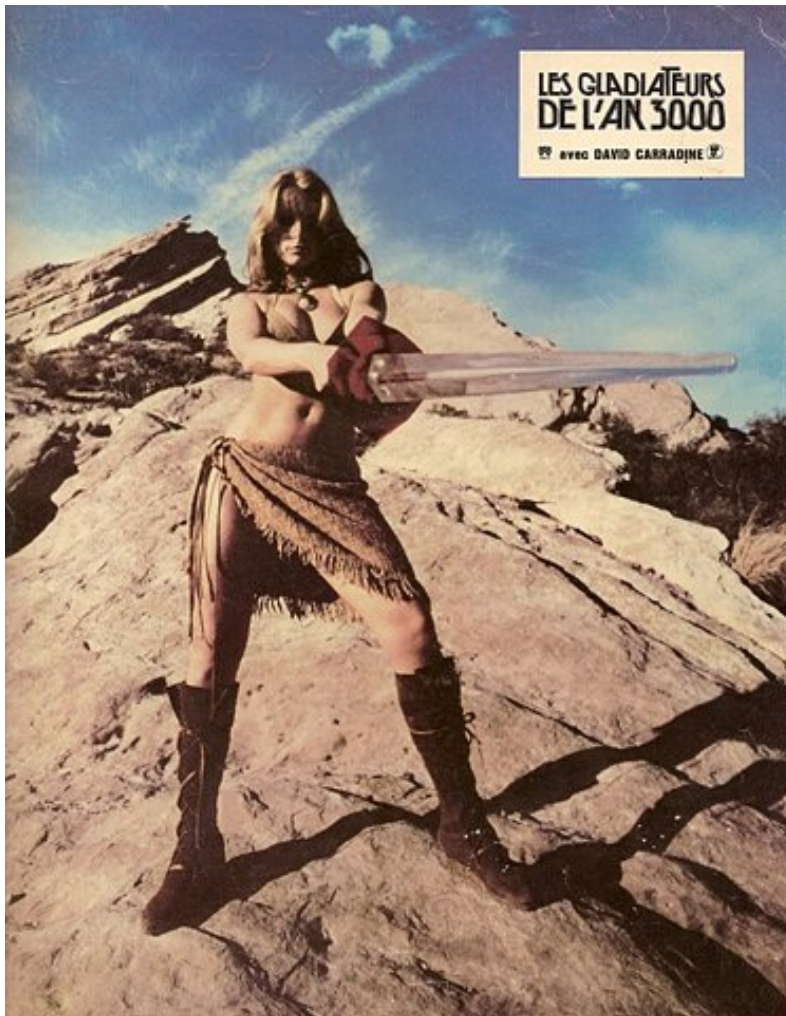
This truly is a cult classic filled with ridiculous scenarios and outrageous acting. The major characters being David Carradine, a very young Sylvester Stallone and one of my favourite cult actresses Mary Woronov.

As a cult classic this is one of the best, it is full of kitsch and camp. There are empty headed TV personalities, gratuitous nudity and breast shots, Euthanasia days for the elderly, girls who want to be killed for their five minutes of fame on the track and a new way to play chicken.

There is quite a bit of B grade blood and gore, but surprisingly not as much as one may expect from the title.

Frankenstein and his super car !





The plot is also not as memorable and most (actually, all) of the satire of the first film has been lost in the second. Don't get me wrong, it is still a very fun film with lots of silly B Grade action, but it just doesn't reach the heights of cult that the first film did.

In **Death Sport** Carradine is a rebel warrior in the year 3000 caught up in the battle in a post apocalyptic world which includes all manner of gladiators on motorbikes, cannibals, mutants and god knows what else.

It also stars the sexy Claudia Jennings which is significant as she offers some gratuitous nude torture scenes which ups the sexiness of **Death Sport** to a new level!

The special effects and sets are woeful, so utterly unbelievable to be a scream. The supposed "Death Machines" are motor cycles with minor modifications and the film spends a lot of the time using motor cycle races and shaky camera work trying to suggest a wild and risky race. They also help pad out the film to its full length.

The race takes first place over the occasional violence which has been made in an obviously faked manner to emphasis the cartoonish nature of the spectacle. This is further emphasized by deliberate speeding up of the racing throughout the film.

While you may expect the cars to look superb, they are clearly made on a very limited budget, they are just normal cars painted with silly attachments such as guns and horns. This, of course, makes the film all the more cheesy and amusing. The futuristic backgrounds are even worse and enough to make your sides hurt with laughter.

This is a truly awesome work of cult entertainment and indeed ranks as one of the best of the cult car race films ever made.

Death Sport is not quite as impressive as **Death Race 2000**. In many ways cult classics come about by accident and while Corman was able to recast Carradine, many of the actors from **Death Race 2000** were no longer available (or too expensive, Stallone had by now done Rocky and for some inexplicable reason become a household name).

The swords used are called "Whistlers" and they are clearly made of Perspex. Indeed they are so fragile that during the final great life threatening duel the film is edited to give a sense of a truly awesome fight but you never see the swords touch ! It is just so utterly bad it is incredible.

I especially like the sex torture scenes which seem to involve girls dancing between some sort of hanging disco devices which suddenly become electrified. Since they are clearly made of plastic I am not sure how this is possible but it certainly allows some gratuitous nudity to be added to the script.

The constant new age babble is astounding with all sorts of inane talk about psychic powers, mental healing and more. The script is so utterly bad you will roll with laughter all the way through. **Death Sport** is the lowest ebb of cult cinema and for that reason alone is utterly entertaining !

Umbrella has produced a new 2 Disc set including both titles which will be more than enough to satisfy the most hungry exploitation junkies appetite.

Hell Ride Roadshow Entertainment R4 DVD

Quentin Tarantino loves exploitation cinema, he talks about it, raves about it and sings its praises. In **Not Quite Hollywood** he told us about his love of Ozploitation, while in **Baadasss Cinema** he raved about Blaxploitation. So many of his films have been homages to cult cinema, from **Jackie Brown** to **Grindhouse**. Now we have **Hell Ride**, a true celebration of the biker movies of the Sixties and Seventies. Produced by Tarantino and directed by Larry Bishop it offers everything we have come to love in such classics as **Easy Rider** and **Stone**. Bikers, drugs, sex, nudity, violence and more violence...



Pistolero gets his fire stoked.

has hidden a large deposit of cash but has no idea where it is, all he has is one key of three which open the safety deposit box.

Pistolero is older but not wiser and remembers what happened to his woman. He is accompanied by the Gent and Comanche, a young recruit who we later find is Kisum's son. Pistolero is noted for his strange moustache, while the Gent speaks in strange riddles and with faux profundity.

The Six-Six-Sixers are lead by Billy Wings who is covered in tats and kills via an air powered cross-bow, he is cruel and brutal. His team are not especially significant and simply follow his lead.

Between them is Eddie Zero, an ally of Pistolero and an old member of the Victors. He regularly fakes his death and seems old and foolish but is sly and manipulative. He is superbly portrayed by the wily Dennis Hopper.

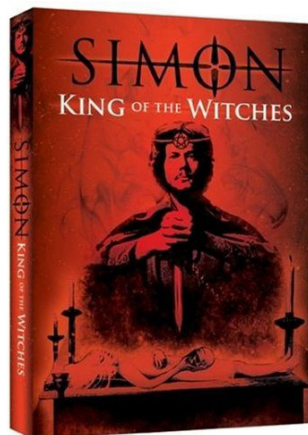
Hell Ride is filled with biker clichés, lots of tits and nudity (including baby oil wrestling babes), gun fights and as many exploitation motifs one can fit within a 90 minute film. The music is superb, evoking the feel of old westerns as well as biker films and rocks throughout the film.

Sure, it could be argued **Hell Ride** is the victory of style over substance but that is what biker exploitation films were all about. As would be expected **Hell Ride** has holes in the plot you can drive a bike through but it doesn't matter. The feel, look and sound of the film transports you back to the heyday of classic biker cinema and it is an experience you will find utterly exhilarating.

The Victors



Simon King of the Witches
Dark Sky
R1 DVD



The late Sixties and early Seventies saw a revival of interest in occultism and Witchcraft. The so-called "Wiccan" and neo-pagan movement developed out of the Sixties search for new spirituality and swept across the US and into England and Australia. It combined the worship of the "Old Gods" of paganism with various forms of ceremonial and ritual magic.

One of better known characters in the movement was and is a ceremonial magician and author Pike Runyon (who today continues to run The Church of Astarte). It is believed the major character Simon Sinestrari was loosely based on him.

The film was released in 1971 and has since been considered a favourite of cult film aficionados and occultists. It is an unusual film in that it is not horror cinema but more of a cynical supernatural thriller, filled with sarcasm, anti-establishment flair and a fairly solid knowledge of occult lore.

Most films covering such territory do not research the subject well, but this film shows a solid background in esoteric thought as well as a great sense of humour. It also features some

King of the Witches or deluded twit ?



nice cinematography and the ability to capture a sense of what the "occult" world of alternative spirituality is like.

Simon opens the film by telling us that although some people call him a warlock, but he is really a modern day wizard, a practitioner of the ancient arts and a man of quite some magical power. In many ways this opening is rather satirical since he lives in a drain pipe and for all his great occult wisdom and supernatural power is picked up by the cops for being a street bum and put in the slammer for the night.

In jail he meets Turk who is fascinated by the enigmatic Simon and soon they form a friendship. Turk is soon introduced to some of Simon's friends, most of which seem superficial and shallow; they seem only interested in Simon due to his eccentricity and the fact they can show him off to their jaded friends.

Hercules is a local trend setter who invites Simon to perform at a party he is hosting. Simon comes and puts on quite a show but when his Simon is ripped off he decides to prove his powers are not to be taken lightly. Along the way he gets together with Linda, a pretty little dope fiend (who also happens to be the daughter of a local law official) and together they practise some sorcery. However, things don't go to plan when a local narcotics officer tries to frame Simon. More and more Simon has to use his skills to protect himself and get revenge, yet the more he does so, his hatred for the establishment grows.

Simon, King of the Witches is quirky and bizarre. It is not a horror film and not even really a thriller, it is more a cult supernatural film filled with witty dialogue, strange rituals and occasional psychedelic flourishes.

The DVD release from Dark Sky is rather impressive; considering it was a little known film from 1971 they have done a great job. Sure, there is a little bit of print damage but it is insignificant. It is much the same with the sound, a solid job with only very occasional problems.

The extras include an interview with the actor who played Simon (Andrew Prine) and an interview with the film's director, Bruce Kessler. There is also a trailer, radio spot and a slideshow of posters, lobby cards etc.

Sinful Dwarf
R0 NTSC DVD
Severin Films
Web: <http://www.severin-films.com>

Some months ago we reviewed the Danish release of **The Sinful Dwarf** from AWE. However, at the time, there was no sign of a US release for the rare and perverse classic. We are thrilled to note that since then Severin has released a superb US release featuring a truly amazing condition print taken from a 35mm copy of the film which Severin claims was found hidden in a janitor's closet at The Danish Film Institute !

The Sinful Dwarf is considered one of the rarest cult exploitation films. On its release in 1973 Variety condemned the film as "repulsive", further declaring "Torben leers and lurches like a demented Bette Davis." For a long time it was very difficult to find copies and most are seriously censored and in notoriously bad condition. Severin has excelled once again and this is the only way to see this obscure classic which includes enough nudity, sex and exploitation to make the timid run from the room in disgust !

The film opens as a young woman wanders innocently along the street without a worry in the world; she is approached by a Dwarf named Olaf (Torben Bille) who is leading a little toy dog by the leash. The young girl seems fascinating by Olaf and his dog and follows him home. They reach where Olaf lives, an old boarding house, and he offers to show her his large collection of toys, just as she begins to enjoy looking at the collection, he knocks her out with his cane.

Peter (Tony Eades) is an unemployed writer; Peter and his wife Mary (Anne Sparrow) are having a hard time making ends meet. They decide to take a room in the boarding-house run

The Gleefully perverse sinful Dwarf !



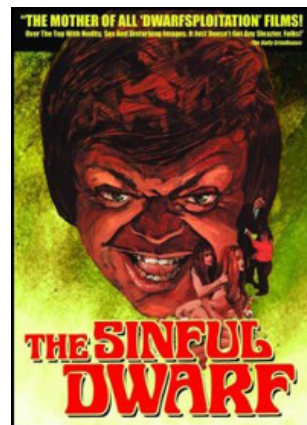
by Olaf and his mother Lila Lash. Lila Lash (Clara Keller) lives in the past when she was a cabaret singer and spends the day steeped in gin.

It seems Lila and her son Olaf have found a new way of covering their costs when the boarders stopped arriving. They kidnap young woman and keep them in the attic addicted to heroin from where they service customers, in other word's they run a rather lively sex trade. Olaf certainly enjoys his job and is a violent little character and this is what makes the film so "politically incorrect", he is the quintessential evil Dwarf or Troll of fairy tales and Torben Bille plays the role with frightening gusto. Clara Keller is also impressive as Lila Lash, when she is drunk enough she reminisces with songs from the old days which are so bad you want to scream. In one memorable scene, she whips one of the girls as she is dressed as Marlene Dietrich singing a Dietrich classic. (If singing is the word, she must have worked very hard to whine so horribly off tune !)

The cinematography makes this a perversely well made exploitation film, the way in which the songs Lash sings are cut to the abuse of the girls is very disconcerting. For example, in one scene she is singing the song Choo Choo Bamba with Olaf on the piano and this is inter-cut with scenes of a client having his "Choo Choo Bamba" with a girl upstairs. Tasteless yes, but it certainly works. The whole of the film is well edited, nicely show and surprisingly professional for such exploitative fare.

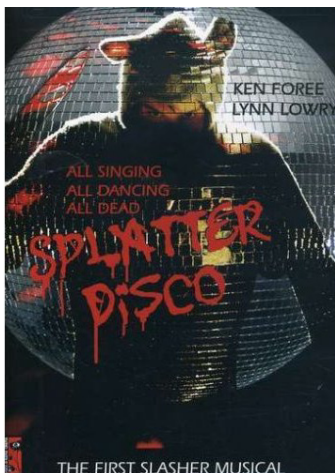
On top of the lively sex trade we have a heroin smuggling ring using teddy bears which is co-ordinated by "Santa Claus" who runs a toy shop. The obsession with toys and bears in many ways are exemplified in Olaf who is a man-child, who on one level plays like a kid, yet on another does what his mother requires and gives very brutal discipline to the girls when required and indeed, seems to relish it. This constant juxtaposition between toys, dolls and teddy bears and the sex trade and heroin trafficking give the whole film a very perverse feel.

A nice extra is the Featurette: The Severin Controversy which looks at the effect this horrid film had on two young minds !!



Splatter Disco
R0 NTSC
Shock-O-Rama
Pop Cinema

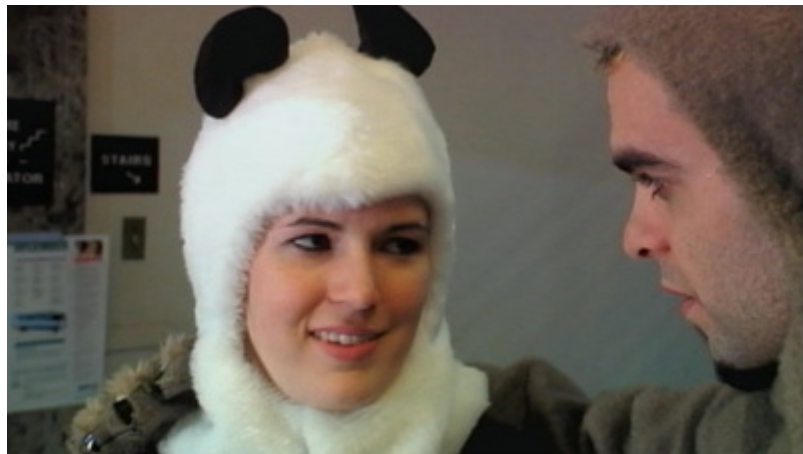
Splatter Disco is an ode to fetishes of all types and a call to resist the hypocrisy of moralists. However, if that was all it was, it would be a fun film but John Water's has done it a lot better. But when you add in a killer who starts to slaughter the club's clientele in gruesome ways you have a very unusual movie. A fetish music and stalker film !



Kent Chubb runs Den O' Iniquity, a fetish club located in conservative Massachusetts. It has been around for a long time starting as a Gentlemen's club in the early 1900's. Along the way it has constantly had to fight against those who want to close it down and once again the battle is on, this time against a narrow minded council and hypocritical moralists. But there is a greater danger hiding in the shadows.

The Chubbs are a strange family, his father Shank, is dying and but very sure of how he sees the world. Kent has some confidence issues but works to walk in his father's footsteps. Together they are committed to the Den O' Iniquity as their family business. Their relationship is one of the high points of the film and is rather beautifully portrayed. The interaction between a dying African American man (played superbly by Ken Foree) and his young adopted son give the film an added dimension which would not be

A new kind of Kink—Furries...



expected in a movie with the title **Splatter Disco** !

The Den O' Iniquity bills itself as a safe place for fetishists to express themselves; there are no drugs or weapons of any kind and they put safety first even banning dildos over 13 inches ! There are lots of furries, open sexuality, leather, whips and more. There is even a guy who rolls himself up in a carpet and likes to get walked on and, of course, let's not forget the pirates !

At the same time the fetishists are not over-done, this is not a sideshow packed with all manner of perversions and oddities. They are shown as simply normal people with unusual ways of life. This is another nice aspect of the film—it simply celebrates the diversity of sexual and social experience without any judgement, for or against. It is simply how people are...

While **Splatter Disco** is filled with fetishism, intrigue and dancing, we are also treated to a range of musical numbers (I especially liked the version of Let's Do It, Lets Fall in Love) and some good lessons about openness, there is even a love story that unfolds throughout the film and lots of humour.

At the same time, of course, there are the murders, but they are really less of the focus of the film than the title suggests. While they add a bit of blood and gore to the equation, the major focus is the battle between freedom of expression and Puritanism, expressed in a very fun and amusing way. In many ways the conservatives look like they are based on the "Westboro Baptist Church" and its hate filled "God Hate Fags" campaign and so the film has a bit of a social message..

As the Mayor and his mean spirited mother plant drugs in the club, it looks like the furries and fetishists and a hippie attorney still on a trip from the Sixties must uncover the conspiracy against them and find the murderer before it is too late.

While this is clearly a low budget film, it has a strange charm, crossing genres to create a rather unusual and fun cult cinema experience.

There are also some nice extras including an excellent commentary, alternate scenes, behind the scenes featurette and more.

CULT EROTICA



More Action Girls

Produced by Scotty JX

Web: [Http://www.ActionGirls.com](http://www.ActionGirls.com)

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Yes, it's more from the **ActionGirls** series. The intro to the fourth DVD says it all ... "This is the twisted vision of Scotty JX, a small-town computer geek turned soft-porn visionary who is combining every man's loves of naked women and action movies into one irresistible package". Soft-porn – yes, and at this rate we won't be re-viewing any more as they fall outside the range of this magazine. Action – well, we will see.

Western Babes Vol. 1

This one still has pretensions to a plot of sorts, but that soon gives way to the sort of show we have come to expect from Scotty JX. The girls wear somewhat more clothing than usual, and leather never looked so good while it was on the cow.



We start with the traditional bar scene, where the bad girls are carousing. Enter the Stranger, clad in a little leather, guns and a lot of baby oil. She rides the world's slowest horse. We finish with the main street gunfight in which one of the girls is killed. It's OK, though – she later comes back to life, probably revived by the magical properties of baby oil.

This is followed by a sequence of a very well developed, unclad young lady riding a horse. This segment is not for people with weak hearts. Cut to the typical cliché western scene with young well-oiled ladies fondling their mammaries in the main street, as seen in all good westerns. OK, it's not Sergio Leone but I bet it would have been if he thought of it first.

Finally we have Scotty JX returning to his roots as the young ladies fire lots of shots from their various guns at absolutely nothing at all (just like their clothing).

This DVD is a victory for baby oil over tight leather.

HorrorBabe.com Vol. 1

Scotty JX returns to his favorite derelict buildings for Sexy Cyborgs. For some inexplicable reason they are wearing glasses with VCR head drums glued onto them.



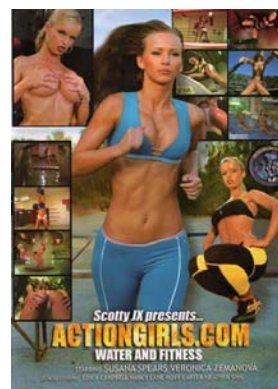
Dead Sexy Babes is a tribute to zombies, but the girls are remarkably well-preserved for undead. Rather surprisingly, Scotty JX has opted for fake blood instead of baby oil.

The Batman sequence that follows is quite surreal and a little incomprehensible, but you do not watch these movies for their dramatic plot anyway. We move on to Nazis, cannibal vampires, Cyborgs fondling their wobbly bits, women with guns (of course), and so on. The costuming has by this stage degenerated to holes held together by small amounts of mesh, and even that is under a lot of strain.

ActionGirls – Water and Fitness

Wow! This is Scotty JX's best yet. There is no semblance of plot, just lovely young ladies doing sporty type things in some quite stunning locations.

These girls look far better than me on a



on a bike – perhaps I don't use enough baby oil?

Well-endowed young ladies like these should not be allowed to skip rope. Sooner or later someone's going to get hurt or have a heart attack.

Baby oil really comes into its own in this DVD. In the swimming scenes there is more oil in the water than the Exxon Valdez disaster. In the battle between baby oil and spandex, once again the baby oil wins. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

If anything, Scotty JX just gets better. He has a knack for finding attractive females, although some of the old favorites are still there (like Veronica Zemanova) and his filming technique and direction are brilliant. Strictly speaking, these are an independent production. Other Indie producers must hate him for the lavish productions he brings to your screen.

For Scotty JX, I think it's a labor of love. So, once again, grab some beer, invite your mates over, sit back and enjoy. There are lots and lots more Action Girls titles, probably too many...anyway visit the website and have a gander at what is available.

Web: <http://www.ActionGirls.com>

Demoniacs

R0 NTSC

Redemption USA

Web: <http://www.salvation-films.com>

Demoniacs (aka **Les Demoniques**) is a strangely compelling work of eroticism by Jean Rollin from 1973. Rollin is a French institution, he created the first French vampire film (**Le Viol du vampire** in 1968), the first French gore film (**Les Raisins de la mort** in 1978) and pioneered French explicit adult films. While he is celebrated by many, others find his work incomprehensible.

His films are never straight forward and cannot be approached like traditional cinema. Rollin makes films like poetry, they have been heavily influenced by Expressionism, Gothicism and Surrealism as well as fantasy and horror cinema. They all have a dreamlike quality and narrative tends to come second to mood, visuals and atmosphere.

Demoniacs is a superb example of his gothic vision expressed through the medium of an erotic pirate film.

The movie opens with a gang of pirates consisting of the Captain and his three accomplices, Bosco, Paul and the dangerously beautiful Tina. They are a violent and uncontrollable bunch and they are only barely tolerated in the small village they live in. They make their living by luring ships to the shore where they pillage the cargo and kill any survivors.

This time the ship produces two survivors, a pair of unnamed beautiful young woman who are in a pretty weak condition when washed up on the beach. They are raped, tortured and left for dead by the pirates with lots of nude shots of Tina along the way !

The gang now go into town to celebrate their latest pillage but the Captain sees the two girls they have just killed. At first he thinks they may have survived or that it could be the booze but soon they realize there are ghosts on their collective tail.

Along the way we learn how the girls became ghosts. It seems that since they were injured they stumbled into a tomb inhabited by some sort of pagan spirit or god. He is accompanied by a hippie priest and a clown ! In exchange for some hot sex, he grants them the ghostly abilities they use to torment the pirates. It seems the girls are not actually dead but have a special ghostly appearance given to them by this deity.

Erotic ghosts taking revenge after being raped by pirates !



But this is just the beginning. As the girls/ghosts return to the tomb they find the pirates have killed the hippie priest and wounded the poor clown. As Tina joins in the fun, the tomb begins to crumble. We are then treated to a rather amusing scene where a statue of Jesus falls onto Tina and seems to be having a rather good time with her !

The pagan spirit, god or devil now tells the poor girls that they must give up their ghostly gift as well as all thoughts of revenge to save the priest and clown. So much for infernal power ! They agree to do so and this time are killed but not before everyone attacks everyone else and they all die !

Demoniacs is certainly a strange film. It is beautifully shot with some truly scrumptious cinematography. Rollin used a small island near France to do the filming and hence was really able to capture the sense of a small island village without any great cost. **Demoniacs** is very quirky combining pirate adventures, eroticism, brutality and a ghost tale - not bad for one film and one clearly made on a limited budget.

It cannot be taken literally; there are so many motifs that can be interpreted in many different ways. The identity of the pagan spirit or god may or may not be the devil and the actual condition of the girls is unclear. Were they killed and brought back from the dead (and then killed a second time) or do they just get given ghostly powers, it is all very mysterious. The narrative of the plot is certainly eccentric to say the least.

But if we take the film as a dream (or nightmare) it has a beautiful mood and is filled to the brim with dark gothic imagery, eroticism and perverse visions. It is certainly a fascinating cinematic experience.

The Escapees
Jean Rollin
Redemption
All Region DVD

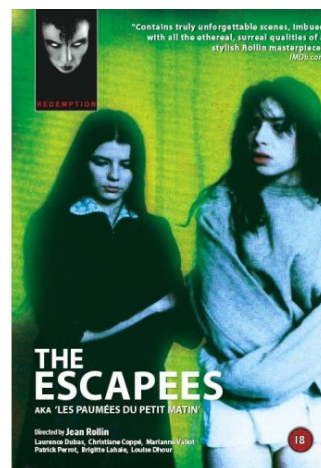
The Escapees is in French with clear white English subtitles.

The Escapees aka '**Les Paumées Du Petit Matin**' is the 1981 release from Jean Rollin which continues his dreamlike vision from such earlier films as **Fascination** (1979) and **Requiem for a Vampire** (1971).

Rollin is considered the father of erotic horror

cinema and has produced a wide variety of films over a very long career.

The Escapees is an intriguing film as it emphasizes the more mesmeric aspects of his work rather than the traditional horror and sex combination found in many of his other films.



Derek Jarman once said when asked how he made film, that he created cinema as a painter not a cinematographer. In many ways the same applied to Rollin, he sees his work as a visionary or dreamer and his films cannot be approached as traditional works of cinema.

They all have an ethereal and surreal quality with flashes of dreams, occasional nightmares, erotic eruptions, violence and death – all one would expect from a journey into the dream-world of the unconscious. Each film is like a Pandora's box - opening the lid on a Freudian dimension of sex, emotion and death.

In **The Escapees** we have a fairytale like story set in a very real world. Two girls, one aggressive and disruptive, the other withdrawn and sullen, find themselves in an uncaring mental institution.

On a dark night they escape beyond the walls hoping to find freedom in the outside world. They meet a group of itinerant erotic dances who perform burlesque shows advertised by word of mouth and performed at the edge of town. They join this exciting and dangerous world and experience things neither expected including raw sexuality, beautiful dancers, erotic lesbian encounters with French adult star Brigitte Lahaie and even violence and death.

Redemption has done a superb job on this very rare film offering an all region release remastered from the original negative. It also includes a specifically shot interview with Jean Rollin discussing **The Escapees** and his many other works.

Redemption Films
Web: <http://salvation-films.com/>

**Malabimba:
The Malicious
Whore
Unrated Edition
R1 DVD
Severin Films**

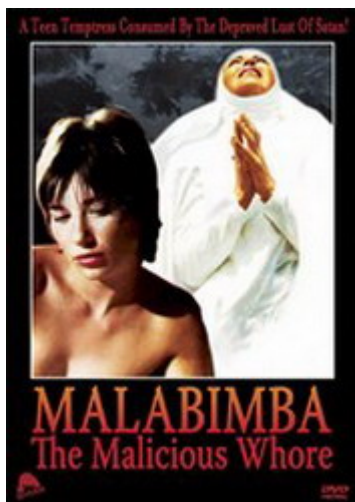
Malabimba: The Malicious Whore opens with a sé-ance you will not easily forget. Andrea Karioli has continued to grieve for his wife Daniela who died many years previously. In a last ditch attempt to make contact with her spirit, he hires a well respected local medium.

Things do not go as planned, rather than Daniela making contact and confirming their love has continued after death, Lucrezia a sex obsessed ancestor puts in an appearance. It seems she either committed suicide or was murdered by one of her many lovers and she is not happy.

She wreaks havoc on the household tearing off women's clothes, undoing men's zips and roaring like a wind through the castle. After she calls them all as whores, pimps and all manner of other expressive phrases, she takes possession of the body of Bimba, the sixteen year old daughter of Andrea.

Andrea Bianchi is a well known Italian filmmaker who made a range of Giallo thrillers including **Strip Nude for your Killer**. Here he has clearly taken the lead from **The Exorcist** and adapted it into Euro trash conventions. Gone is the inno-

Sister Sofia is seduced by Bimba and taught the forbidden secrets of lesbian love.



cent pain of a young possessed girl, here we have the uncontrollable sexuality of a sixteen year old girl possessed by a nymphomaniac spirit with rather filthy tastes !

This is no average nympho, she takes everything she can get. We have scenes of rough sex, masturbation, sex with fluffy toys (from a bear to a Christmas elf), incest (she tries to seduce her dad and then kills her uncle with some accomplished mouth work) and finally, the crowning glory, she seduces Sister Sofia.

The climax is a twist as it seems that naughty old Lucrezia was after the Nun after all and after a rather nice soliloquy about lust, Sofia throws herself off the castle wall saving poor Bimba's soul, even though Bimba's body is already quite worse for wear !

This is a superbly perverse film, packed with sex, demonic possession and family squabbles. This is the unrated edition and certainly packs a nice punch; it is suitably explicit, at times erotic, at other times perverse. It has a great sense of dark humour as it ridicules the pretensions of the rich family at the centre of the tale and also features a rather cool 70's soundtrack.

The DVD release from Severin also includes a selection of deleted scenes which can also be viewed integrated into the film. I found this the preferred option as these scenes including quite a lot of back-story as well as a lot of interesting extra dialogue. These extra scenes are certainly not as clear as the excellent quality of the print itself, but as this is quite a rare Euro cult film, to simply have these scenes is marvellous.

Malabimba Uncovered is an excellent documentary which features modern interviews with Mariangela Giordano and cinematographer Franco Villa, who relate numerous stories and anecdotes from the set. They also explain loud and clear that the hardcore was not shot during the production but created later and added in.

Malabimba is a superb Euro trash film which has all the sex and strangeness to make it a must for cult film lovers.

Severin Films

Web: <http://www.severin-films.com>

CULT HORROR



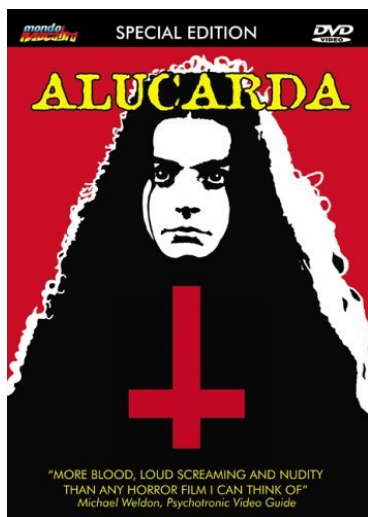
Alucarda
Directed by Juan
Lopez
Moctezuma
Mondo Macabro
R1 DVD

Alucarda is a very adult work of horror entertainment which looks like a cross between a Ken Russell film and **The Exorcist**. It is wickedly entertaining and is surreal, full of excessive scenes, bizarre, humorous as well as blasphemous dialogue and a heavily sexualized approach to Nunsplotation. The sets and costumes are quite astounding, the chapel has a strange cave like appearance and the nun's outfits are more like the bindings of a mummy than traditional clothing. This is a beautifully filmed work which is filled with strange and compelling imagery.

The director Juan Lopez Moctezuma had a close relationship with Aleandrjo Jodorowsky and Fernando Arrabel – and was closely involved in what became known as the Panic Movement. The Panic movement was inspired by the god Pan and influenced by the work of Luis Buñuel and Antonin Artaud. It was a deliberate revolt against what was seen as the degeneracy of surrealism.

The Panic Movement believed Surrealism had become the plaything of the bourgeois and that only through cinema that shocked and confronted could the movement be saved. While Jodorowsky dissolved the movement in 1973 many films, including **Alucarda**, show its influence.

The combination of deliberately confronting and shocking imagery with surrealism certainly offers a unique visual experience.



The film opens with the birth of a child. To protect the child's life, the mother entrusts her to a local gypsy. Some fifteen years later we meet Alucarda, a young girl who is trying to be part of the life of a convent but finds herself at odds with nearly everything they do and teach, she constantly wears black clothing and seems melancholic to say the least. She has made friends with Justine, who is only in the convent as her parents have died and she has nowhere else to go. They become very close friends (ahh ! the joys of young lesbian love) and rather than taking to the austere lifestyles required of a nun, they spent inordinate amounts of time in the woods together doing what young girls do.

One day they meet a very strange gypsy, who offers to read Alucarda's palm and tell her what the future holds. However, as the gypsy reads her palm, suddenly the gypsy looks away in horror and mumbles indecipherable but ominous comments about what is in store, Alucarda is terrified by what she hears.

Horny Devil(s) in Alucarda





Blood, sex, gore and religion, wow !

However, Justine promises to stand by her and after some sort of quirky past life experience and offering of eternal love between the girls they open a coffin in an abandoned chapel and a strange eerie noise is heard.

It seems that opening the coffin has unleashed a randy, evil and uncontrollable spirit which takes hold of Alucarda. Time and time again Alucarda feels like she has done this all before and due to the force of these flashbacks she begins to become possessed.

By this stage things are getting pretty weird. The gypsy appears in their room and using a dagger, pricks their breasts and forces them to drink each other's blood. Alucarda is now totally possessed and doesn't take being in the convent lightly.

During a scripture class, in a rather fun scene, Justine and Alucarda mock the nun in charge and begin to loudly praise Satan. Justine collapses while Alucarda attacks Father Lázaro during confession. These are fun girls to have around.

Father Lázaro seems to have been educated in a rather Medieval tradition and is a priest with steeped in the forbidden knowledge of demonology, he immediately comes to the conclusion that "it's a heliophobic demon! That's a sixth-category devil who hates light!" and starts prepping for an exorcism.

No use wasting time with pesky second opinions, even the convent's doctors advice that the

girls are sick and not possessed is conveniently ignored. Who needs medicine when god is on your side !

As you do in an exorcism, Justine is stripped naked and tied to a cross. She is then pierced with needles while Alucarda--also tied up--can do nothing. When she yells and screams in protest, she is knocked out. The doctor arrives and with the only voice of reason in this mad world of religious excess denounces the stupidity and hysteria of the convent, but Justine is dead and the pos-

sessed Alucarda is very pissed off.

Now it seems the undead somehow enter the equation. Justine's corpse is nowhere to be found and one of the nuns has been burnt to death. Father Lázaro taking a leap in faith and for no apparent reason chops the head off the poor nun's corpse, which then reanimates writhing and screaming.

As they search for Alucarda they find Justine lying naked in a coffin filled to the brim with blood, she returns to life. The doctor, now convinced of the power of the cross, throws holy water on her and she starts to burn but in her final death throws she tears out Sister Angelica's throat, a damn good showing I must say.

Alucarda now runs amok tormenting the nuns and monks in the convent as the possessed tend to do, monastics are bursting into flame spontaneously and the cave like chapel and building is shaking with statues crashing to the ground. Sister Angelica's body is returned to the convent and head in a Christ-like pose which for some reason confronts Alucarda who dies with her body vanishing into thin air !

Alucarda has superb cinematography, amazing sets, stunning costumes, witty and cutting dialogue filled with humour and blasphemy, solid character development (Alucarda is a real charmer) and a plot which will have your scratching your head for quite some time after you watch it.

There is even an bonus 20 minute history of Mexican horror films !

Blitzkrieg Escape from Stalag 69 Wild Eye Releasing

Naziploitation cinema is a genre of exploitation film which has a strong emphasis on sex and violence. It uses World War II and National Socialism as a pretext to explore all manner of sexual and violent excess.

The most celebrated in the field is **Ilsa, She Wolf of the S.S.** (1974). Ilsa starred Dyanne Thorne as the Aryan commander who tortures her way through a Nazi camp working to prove her theory that woman were more able to deal with pain than men.

Ilsa castrates men who fail to satisfy her (and that is most of them) and enjoys flogging workers who speak to the female slaves, she is cruel but erotic and it is this mixture which made Ilsa such a successful film and so controversial. This mixture has become the foundation of Naziploitation cinema.

Ilsa was directed by Don Edmonds using the sets from Hogan Heroes after the series was cancelled and hence the sets look far more professional than one would expect from an exploitation film. **Ilsa** was followed by a range of related sexploitation films in a similar vein such as **Ilsa Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks** etc but



these fall outside the genre. **Ilsa the Wicked Warden** had some themes in common but was more a women's prison exploitation film.

Ilsa has been regularly heavily censored and unedited editions really only became available with the release of DVD. New releases have included a US Anchor Bay Edition and a superb Dutch box set of all the Ilsa films.

Other examples of the genre include the earlier 1969 **Love Camp 7**, **Hell Camp** (1977) and **Love Train for the S.S.** (1977) but Ilsa is really seen as the standard for its extreme level of violence and its surprisingly professional acting and presentation.

The genre has always been a sensitive one exploiting an explosive historical event for laughs, sex and violence, at the same time it has produced a wide range of cult films ranging from serious exploitation to comedy.

Blitzkrieg Escape from Stalag 69

is a low budget Naziploitation from cult director Keith Crocker (**Bloody Ape**). It is a sort of Mel Brooks come Troma version of Naziploitation cinema filled with humour, weird characters, violence and gore and, strange as it may seem, a musical number.



The film opens as Schultz is in Argentina escaping Israeli agents and he decides that his time on the run may be drawing to a close and so he must confess. As we watch his confession (to a rather bewildered priest), we are transported back in time to 1943 to the POW camp he ran in Germany and we experience his life as a S.S. Commandant who had the final say over life and death.

The film roams through Naziploitation territory including torture scenes, strange medical



A war scene from Blitzkrieg

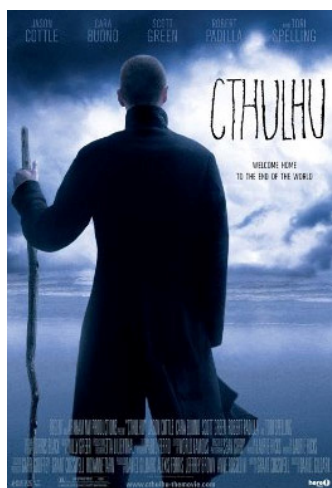
experiments and, of course, the inmates devising a plan to escape. There is a lot of flesh on show including full frontal nudity torture scenes, a nude catfight in the showers and a sex scene. There is even a very cool and sexy scene of a woman wearing nothing but a pair of boots running around the woods shooting at German soldiers !

This is cheesy, sexy, bizarre and at time just plain gore ridden but it makes damn good cult cinema. If you have a very broad sense of humour and enjoy some sex and violence, then you will love this one !

Web: <http://www.wildeyedvd.com>

Cthulhu Regent Releasing Here Films/ Liberation Entertainment R1 DVD

H.P. Lovecraft (August 20, 1890 – March 15, 1937) was a writer of strange fiction and horror. He produced works which profoundly changed the way we view dark fantasy and literature. While his work did not achieve great fame during his lifetime, after his death his tales slowly began to attract a larger and larger audience until today he is celebrated as a 20th century master of the macabre. One of his major



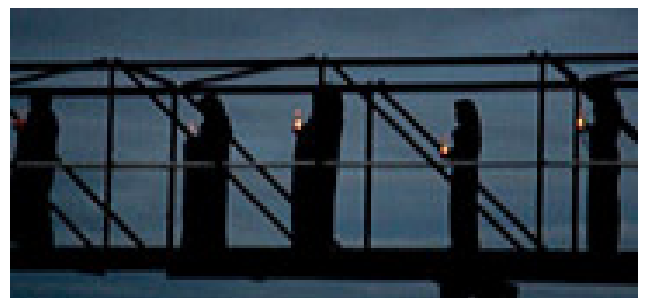
bequests to horror literature is the “Cthulhu Mythos”. Lovecraft eschewed the romanticism of so much horror literature of his time and offered a deeply pessimistic view of the world where man was part of a greater scheme which he did not understand and which involved forces which were detrimental to his survival. While he used a wide range of esoteric and occult themes as literary motifs, he was an atheist and materialist and simply used spirituality as an allegorical expression of man’s alienation and isolation. He saw man locked in a unsuccessful battle against the insurmountable forces of nature.

There have been a vast number of explorations of the works of Lovecraft in cinema. From the early B grade spectacular of **Dunwich Horror** (1970) to the various gore extravaganzas of Stuart Gordon such as **Re-Animator** (1985) and **From Beyond** (1986). While these, and the many others, have their charm, none really embodied the real sense of dread which permeates the Cthulhu Mythos. The mythos clearly expresses a belief that there something is innately wrong with the universe, that man is at best a species here for the short term, at worst a pest and that his time has come.

Cthulhu is a spectacular exploration of the essence of the work of Lovecraft. Based loosely on The Shadow Over Innsmouth it explores the themes of alienation and otherness by combining two very different tales. First we have the experience of a gay professor returning to the narrow small town he grew up in and having to deal and the dangers of being an “outsider” in such a closed environment. This highly personal, emotional and at times erotically charged story is the window through which we experience the story of Cthulhu.

This is an extremely moody and atmospheric work, filled to the brim with suspense and tension. While obviously made on a limited budget, it shows what can be done with a deep understanding of horror cinema.

Weird Cultists





Russ gets drugged and is forced to impregnate Tori Spelling no less !

It uses a very limited amount of special effects and focuses on character, storytelling and mood and succeeds admirably. It moves between family melodrama, horror tale and surrealist fantasy without a pause and in my mind is one of the first films to really take up the mantle of the Cthulhu mythos and run with it in a serious manner.

Russ March is a gay college history professor living in Seattle who receives word that his mother has died. He left his home town of Rivermouth, Oregon many years before and has never looked back. Now he must return and face the narrowness of the community and his strangely religious family.

As he drives away from the city towards Oregon everything seems to hint at disaster. From news of the death of the last polar bear on the radio to a fatal auto accident he sees as he drives into town. It seems the world is going to hell in a hand basket.

Due to the accident he does not arrive in time for the funeral but is convinced to stay a few days due to the auctioning of his mother's house and related legal protocols. He is not impressed. His father is just as fanatical as ever

and while his sister Danni seems to be working to keep the peace, something just doesn't seem right. As he attempts to adjust to having to be in Rivermouth for even a short time, he has a nice surprise. He bumps into Mike, a school friend with which he used to fool around and they begin to explore a relationship.

Slowly Russ notices that things in Rivermouth are not right. There are strange rites going on at the seaside, his father's religious rhetoric has become even more disturbed and a large number of children have vanished and yet no one seems to care. The further

he digs into the history of Rivermouth the more trouble he finds himself in. He is drugged and used to impregnate a young woman and finds himself framed for the killing of a young boy.

The way in which the film explores the alienation Russ experiences as a gay man in an isolated township, his experiences of homophobia and the demands of family to produce offspring at any cost is powerful. It adds a deep and profound new level to the Cthulhu mythos and indeed brings it into the modern age. The Shadow Over Innsmouth was originally written in 1931 and it is testament to the director of this film that he has been able to explore the story in a new and insightful manner.

Superb dream sequence from Cthulhu



This is very intelligent filmmaking with a plot which is superbly written.

The cinematography is very accomplished from the superb countryside of Oregon to the surreal dreamlike sequences later in the film.

One of the most outstanding sequences is Russ's journey through the underground tunnel network where, lit simply from flashes of his camera, he comes to see some of the real inhabitants of the township. It is done so simply, yet so suspenseful and tense. You find yourself right on the edge of your seat as you look closely at the screen wondering what the next camera flash will reveal.

Cthulhu really brings home the mood, atmosphere and sheer terror of the dark view of the world that Lovecraft envisioned.

It is deliberately confusing, confronting and challenging. At times you wonder whether Russ is more at risk from the narrowness of the town's people than from their strange and perverse religious practises which are bringing about the apocalypse.

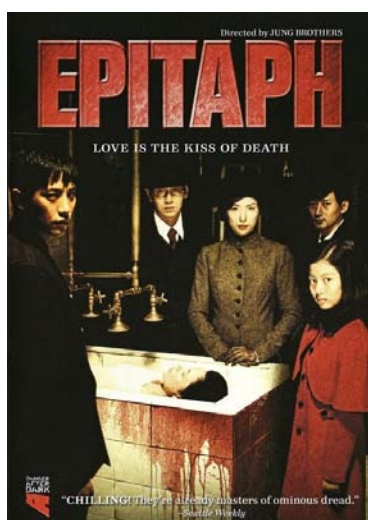
The ending leaves you considering the nature of the film and as you reflect you will come to the conclusion, like I did, that Cthulhu is the best indie film I have seen in a very long time.

Epitaph
R1 DVD
Danger After
Dark
TLA Releasing

Epitaph is a visually stunning and surreal ghost tale from first-time writers and directors the Jung Brothers.

Do not expect this tale to follow a logical path as it meanders through tales of love, obsession and death.

It is comprised of a number of interconnected stories which use as their background an old Korean hospital which is beautifully portrayed with its polished wooden floors, long corridors, unreliable electricity and unusual morgue.



The film opens with black and white footage of experimental brain surgery on a decorated war veteran, it goes horribly wrong and one of the nurses is stabbed in the neck with a scalpel. This event reverberates throughout the film and it seems to cause the hospital to become the focus of various horrific and ghostly hauntings.

A medical student is inexplicably drawn to a beautiful dead girl; a troubled child is tortured by bloody visions of her dead parents; and a married couple find themselves investigating a series of gory murders in which they seem to be directly involved.

While the plot could be said to be somewhat derivative of similar Asian ghost and horror films, the cinematography makes it stand on its own. Every scene seems to be meticulously planned; the camera focuses on very specific angles which give you a strange sense of foreboding even when nothing untoward is occurring.

The violence and gore is also well used and the ghosts are impressively confronting, each character seems uniquely perverse and nothing is what it seems.

When all this is combined with a superbly atmospheric soundtrack *Epitaph* becomes a very eerie experience indeed.

One of the things that stood out for me was the emphasis on the "texture" of each scene. Whether it be the focus on snow (as a prelude to supernatural appearances), a snail crawling out of a container, water dripping from a body or a snow globe.

Each image is presented in such a way that they have a symbolic significance which is puzzling and intriguing.

Vision of Snails in Epitaph





Surreal explorations of death and beyond..

Even a hair pin with a butterfly on the end becomes a highly visceral image of violence and murder.

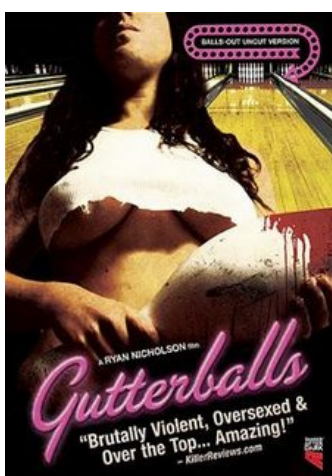
Epitaph is much like a long nightmare; it has a continual dreamlike quality which makes it both seductive and frustrating. At times you wonder what the heck is going on but at the same time you continue watching as you are fascinated by the mood the film creates.

An old hospital, failed surgery, ghosts, murder, necrophilia and a demented serial killer matched with superb cinematography and a sinister soundtrack, how can you go wrong? What *Epitaph* may lack in innovation, it makes up in style and mood. It will keep you guessing right to the end and certainly is an accomplished Korean chiller.

Gutterballs R1 DVD TLA Releasing

This edition of **Gutterballs** is the uncut "balls out" edition from TLA releasing and it certainly is a shock to the system.

This is a film where the slasher and rape-revenge genre of the 1980's meets the post modern violence of the "naughties". It is filled with excessive violence, gratuitous sex and rape and a lot more to shock and offend.



It is deliberately over the top, showing explicit sex, buckets and buckets of gore and lots of very politically incorrect humour.

The Raison d'être of **Gutterballs** was to make a homage to the slasher and rape-revenge films of the Eighties, ranging from **Friday 13th** to **I Spit on your Grave**.

The question is Does it work? This is hard to answer. As a cult film packed with excess it certainly packs a punch, you will not

see another film with as much explicit sex and violence as well as deliberately skewed murder sex set pieces anywhere else. From oral sex gone horribly wrong to a transsexual given her sex change by force, it certainly pushes the limits.

A brief synopsis will give you some feel for the film. Two bowling teams converge on an Xcalibur, a bowling alley to have a game; however they take their sport very seriously. One team is filled with foul-mouthed sexist, homophobic inbred morons. The other team is a group of "outsiders" including all manner of punks, slutty woman, gays and cross dressers.

This allows the filmmakers to indulge in all manner of obnoxious dialogue and off-colour humour, the problem is that the humour runs out very quickly and the film becomes vicious, very vicious.

After a violent clash over the game, the morons steal one of the girl's handbags and use it to lure her back to the game room and rape her. This scene is especially troublesome. It is explicit, extremely violent and way too extended – eight minutes for a rape scene seems to go on forever. While this is meant to be a homage to rape-revenge films, it goes way beyond what is

Tits and sex in Gutterballs





BBK takes his Revenge—but for some reason it is on absolutely everyone...

necessary. There is a gratuitous focus on the rape which is uncomfortable and even seems to delight in what it shows.

Personally I have little trouble with the sex and penetration shown in other sections of the film, but the rape scene and some of the prejudicial killings (such as the murder of the cross dresser/transperson) seems to be crass, nasty and vicious rather than amusing.

This is a supposedly a comedy film, but it loses its humour quickly and becomes rather spiteful. The humour seems to be at the very lowest level and at times seems to be aimed to “easy targets” - this is a film which could have been a lot better with some attention to script and plot.

Anyway, as the morons return to the bowling alley, both parties are locked in and a killer (known only as BBK) starts knocking them all off. He not only kills the rapists but the other team as well, since the rape it seems all bets are off and everybody is fair game. This is one of the more ridiculous aspects of the story, why kill everyone, even the victims friends ?

The supposed logic is that they did not protect her from being raped, but how the hell could they do that when they did not even know it was occurring. This takes the whole film from being a rape revenge film to simply being an excuse for rampant violence and gore.

Okay, there are lots of gorehound films on the market, but none use rape in quite such an explicit and exploitative manner.

Gutterballs is controversial and shocking, it is a

love letter to extreme cinema and on one level works exceptionally well.

At the same time **Gutterballs** seems to illustrate a trend in recent “indie” films, a deliberate exaggeration of violence and sex to “make a name”.

It is as though they feel that if they shock, stun, horrify and offend their audience they will be remembered forever and this is the best way to succeed in the film industry. Ultimately, an eight minute rape scene in a standard length film is excessive.

It is not that I did not find **Gutterballs** entertaining; it is that it is deliberately skewed to offend. The rape scene is extended, the killer attacks everyone (not just the rapists) and the killings are deliberately offensive including what could be perceived as rather nasty attacks on sexual minorities. The language and humour is deliberately crass and grates after even a few minutes.

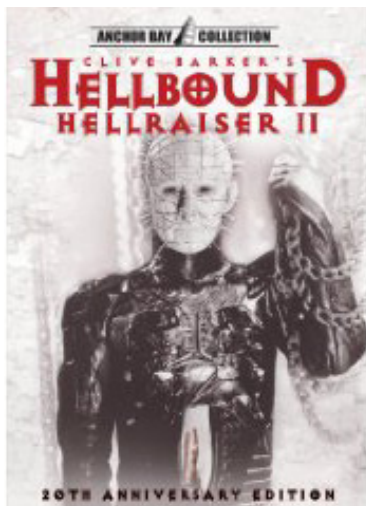
The explicit sex has shocked many people, but to be honest doesn't especially worry me, sex is sex. Even though it doesn't add a lot to the film, except perhaps a bit of spice ! There is some fun sexually violent scenes especially one involving chocking during oral sex.

Ultimately **Gutterballs**, especially the balls out uncut edition, is a film that the viewer will need to make their own decision on.

It has a sense of style and presentation and quite a bit going for it yet at the same time **Gutterballs** seems to “cut its own throat” by not having a good editor look over the script and tighten the plot. Sometimes less is more and you can make a more powerful film by better editing and a bit of inference rather than showing every last second of a given scene.

I have thought a lot about **Gutterballs** and debated with myself how I would review it. Would I recommend it ? That depends, if you are up for a challenge and willing to see an in your face horror film experience which may easily offend, then go for it. However, just remember, in regards to some of the content, you have been warned.

**Hellbound:
Hellraiser II
20th Anniversary
Edition
Anchor Bay
R1 DVD**



In 1987, Clive Barker, an up and coming young writer of transgressive horror and fantasy, adapted his own short novel, *The Hellbound Heart*, for the screen. What resulted was a literal revolution in horror; Barker also directed the film and created one of the most transgressive and challenging horror films of the Eighties - **Hellraiser**. The central motif of the film is the Cenobites.

The term "cenobite" comes from individuals who live an isolated life within small cells as part of a monastic order. Now what is the connection between monks and the figures in **Hellraiser** which look like leather outfitted sado masochists ?

Well, it could be reasoned (and many biographies of such figures bear this out) that when an individual withdraws himself from the world and lives in a literal "isolation chamber" all manner of emotions and desires are exaggerated, to the point where many go quite insane. The history of saints and monastics is in many cases the history of emotional aberration and extreme neurosis.

Kirsty's dad asking for help from Hell or is it ?



Hellraiser created a mythology where the Cenobites are denizens of the underworld and exist as explorers of the extremes of pleasure and pain, their tools are whips, chains, knives, hooks and other accessories which transcend the confines of the flesh. They take pain and pleasure to the ultimate limits and beyond. They only communicate with those on earth who have invited them via the puzzle box (known as the Lament Configuration) which acts as an inter-dimensional doorway.

When they have been called they cannot be dismissed, there is no turning back. There are laws which govern the box and the behavior of the Cenobites, no matter how cruel they seem. The Cenobites are led by Pinhead and together they lead their victims to the depths of hell where they can experience flesh in a very new way for eternity.

Hellraiser was an instant success, bringing Barker immediate celebrity status, one year later, Tony Randel took the director's seat for the sequel **Hellbound**. **Hellbound** begins exactly where the first film finished off. We get a recap of the story thus far and then we see the creation of Pinhead. This is quite a startling and powerful scene. We see a lone figure in army uniform in a building which evokes a religious mood, it has curved walls and light streams from above his head. It looks like a Church but it isn't and that's about right considering what is about to occur.

As he opens the box, a small opening appears in the top, as he looks over it, he is hit with multiple chains which tear open his flesh. His head is then cut into a grid pattern and nails are hammered in - Pinhead is born !

The film then moves its focus to Kirsty who with her boyfriend are the sole survivors of the first film. Locked in a mental institution as the police investigate the death of her family, she is being treated by Dr. Channard, however, he is not the sympathetic doctor he first seems.

When he hears her tale he requests the mattress on which Julia expired be brought to his home.



Pinhead

It seems Dr. Channard is an occultist and has been fascinated by the puzzle box for many years and has a large collection of the boxes and related items which fill his home.

Dr.Channard brings a patient from his mental institution whose psychiatric condition involves an obsessive state where he sees his body infected and covered in maggots. Channard gives him a straight razor. In an especially confronting scene, the patient slashes his body with abandon and his blood brings about the resurrection of Julia.

For a while the film has a similar “resurrection” theme to the original **Hellraiser**, however, this time it focuses on Julia rather than Uncle Frank. As Channard provides Julia with victims she consumes them to regain her beauty (which is clearly skin deep !) and comes back to the world of the living. Channard, however, wants more, a lot more. He uses Tiffany, a young mute girl with a penchant for puzzles, to open the box and the Cenobites come out to play.

This time rather than focusing on the Cenobites here on earth, the film explores the hell realms

which look like a satanic version of an Escher design.

Within hell it seems every individual has their own domain so we see everything from a dark circus to Uncle Franks sexually frustrating realm of ghosts who offer pleasure but never deliver.

Hellbound: Hellraiser II really is a great film, it expands so many of the themes found in the original. We come to understand a lot more about the Cenobites especially Pinhead and are introduced to some fun new characters including “The Doctor”, a very twisted Cenobite formed when Dr.Channard is taken to hell by Julia and gets to experience his heart's desire.

It is fair to say that since it was a film made twenty years ago that some of the special effects are a bit dated but it still stands the test of time well and is certainly a dark and transgressive horror experience. In many ways the **Hellraiser** series (primarily movies 1-3) are classic cult horror films with a new and

unique take on the genre, you won't see demons like these anywhere else.

Hellraiser: Hellbound—The 20th Anniversary edition has a lot going for it, the image quality is good for its age and the sound is especially impressive. While the back speakers are not used as often as in a modern Dolby Digital 5.1 soundtrack, the atmospherics (such as lightning, wind etc) do work well. My only gripe was after twenty years I would have liked to have seen a director's cut with extra footage, but we can't have everything we want.

There are lots of rather cool extras including four featurettes: The Soul Patrol which features new interviews with Cenobite performers Simon Bamford, Nicholas Vince, and Barbie Wilde and Outside The Box which includes a new interview with Director Tony Randel about how Hellbound shaped his creative future.

There is also The Doctor Is In which offers an interview with Kenneth Cranham on his experiences playing the villainous Dr. Channard and Under the Skin with a new interview with Doug Bradley (Pinhead). There is also a nice selection of promotion materials, posters etc.

Late Bloomer Bone House Asia R1 DVD

Late Bloomer is a very different sort of film; on so many levels it defies the conventions of both filmmaking in general and horror to be specific. While it could be placed within the serial killer genre, it is made with an exceptionally naturalistic style. There are no refined camera angles, horror music, jumps or shocks, simply the real life of a disabled man who can no longer cope with his existence.

Like any other human being he craves intimacy but when it cannot be fulfilled his jealousies lead to the abuse of alcohol and finally to much worse. It would have been way too easy for such a film to become exploitative, but it doesn't. It portrays his struggles in a sympathetic manner, even when his experiences lead to violence and murder. It seems so honest and intimate and that's what makes the film so much more confronting.

Sumida is a severely handicapped man who can only communicate through an electronic device. He has severely limited mobility and travels via an electric wheelchair. He must rely on others for his daily survival and has various helpers who come in and prepare food, help with cleaning and so on.

His life is one of dissatisfaction, he spends most of his time collecting toys, listening to music and getting drunk. The alcohol hides his alienation

An unexpected killer..



Masakiyo Sumida played Masakiyo Sumida.

for the world around him; he has lots of helpers but no one who actually "reaches" him.

Sumida gets a new helper called Nobuko. She has taken the job as part of her thesis and hence her motives are in question. She seems far more interested in documenting his life and photographing him than really helping him. He becomes obsessed with her and propositions her, she not only refuses but he notes she is spending a lot of time with another helper called Take. He becomes more and more enraged; it is as though her actions are a catalyst for all his fury against the world.

Sumida finds an outlet for his fury. He goes out at night and randomly stabs people. He finds it much easier than he first thought as people do not suspect that such a profoundly disabled person could commit such acts of violence and he continues to vent his hatred of the world unchallenged.

What is so remarkable about Late Bloomer is that Sumida is played by a real life disabled person with cerebral palsy (also called Sumida) and hence there is an air of authenticity that could not have been portrayed otherwise.

The film has been shot in black and white and has a strange "home video" feel; it is as though we are watching Sumida's life through his private diary, experiencing his dissatisfaction with his life and the world.

This is a difficult film- artistic, reflective and unusual. While it certainly is a serial killer film, it is naturalistic in its presentation and acting and relies on a mixture of character development and mood to communicate. It is very different from anything seen in the genre before and an intriguing experience.

Red Victoria R1 DVD Well Go USA

Red Victoria is a horror comedy based on a simple yet unusual premise. Jim (Anthony Brownrigg, who directed and wrote the film) is searching for his muse. He has written many film scripts but most tend to be highbrow titles with pretensions towards art-house.

His agent is not impressed and has not been able to sell a script in quite a while and tells Jim in not too subtle terms that he must write something more commercial if he wants to make his house payments or indeed, cover his agent's fees. Jim is not impressed.

His agent's advice is to write a horror script since "Horror" is the new in-thing. He encourages Jim to try his hand at the new genre and advises him to make sure it is filled with blood and sex.

Things do not go well; he asks a gore fiend friend for advice and just finds himself as confused as ever. He gets bogged down in lots of talk about potential weapons and various way to kill people but he cannot come up with characters or even a simple plot. He more he thinks about it the more depressed he becomes. His friends are no help and cannot believe that the arty Jim is even trying to write in such a low-brow manner.

Jim does what anyone would do in a similar

Jim and Red Victoria



Red Victoria educates Jim about the nature of terror.

situation, he hits the bottle.

As he falls into a drunken stupor he expresses his frustration in an intense poetic invocation and calls upon his muse to break his writer's block. He has no idea that his muse will not only respond but will take a rather bewildering form, since his desire is to know the nature of horror.

His muse Victoria returns from the dead and begins to show Jim the path of death. As he is a slow learner she kills off his friends and associates in all sorts of startling ways to show him the essence of fear. Jim must quickly learn how to deal with Victoria or follow his muse wherever she leads.

Red Victoria is a comedy horror which is quirky but entertaining. It has its share of violence and horror, but focuses on the comedy through a witty and entertaining dialogue.

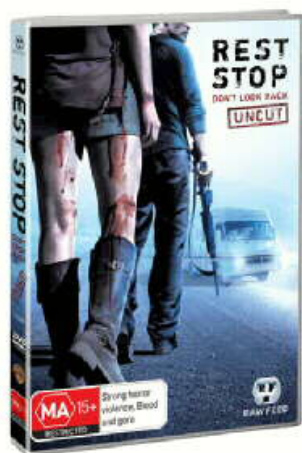
At times I found the humour a little "too clever" bordering on pretentious and it took away from the story but not enough to ruin the tale. It could be argued that since Jim is meant to be a literary romance novelist with dreams of grandeur the focus on wit and black humour fits the character and so is justified.

The character development and acting is solid and the makeup and presentation of the undead muse is certainly impressive. Indeed I think that the look and "mood" of "Red Victoria" are the major drawing card of the film. She is a great character with lots of depth, good repartee and this helps transport her character way beyond the horror of her looks.

Red Victoria is unusual, intriguing and certainly is a different sort of Indie horror comedy.

Web: <http://wellgousa.com>

**Rest Stop:
Don't Look Back
Uncut
R4 DVD
Warner Bros**



Rest Stop 2 or Rest Stop: Don't Look Back continues on from the first film and adds in a back story to flesh out the plot. The explanation offered is not especially logical or credible, at times the film seems a bit confused and you begin to wonder just who is slaughtering, torturing and mutilating who. There are lots of weird characters from an insane religious family with perverse boy twins, a dwarf and nymphomaniac wife and a loony preacher as the patriarch. Then there is the “driver” who tortures everything in sight. Exactly how these two are connected is anyone’s guess. All we get is a strange tale about an Indian curse and how being buried without your eyes turns you into a wandering malevolent spirit. If you try and make too much sense of it you will get frustrated and give up. However, if you accept it as a gore ridden, blood drenched slasher film with a ghost sub plot then it has its moments.

The backstory of the film as it is goes something like this. The Old Highway is a strange realm where the dead run wild. The dividing line between this world and the Old Highway is the Rest Stop, yet despite all sorts of warnings travelers still go down the Old Highway. As the film opens a particularly mad group called the Win-

Filled to the brim with gore and torture



nebago Family pick up a passenger whose car has broken down, little do they know he is “The Driver”. The Driver is having a wild time with the preacher’s wife when he is knocked out. When he wakes up he finds he is tied to a bench. He is told in no uncertain terms he must be cleansed for his sins. With lots of hymn singing, he is tortured and killed. However, since he is the Driver, he returns from the dead, kills his murderers (who also become spirits) and goes on his way. It seems one killer deserves another.

Tom returns from Iraq and finds his brother Jesse has gone missing. Since the police have no clue he takes his blonde bombshell girlfriend and geek friend along for the search. Of course, they reach the Rest Stop and The Driver (and the Winnebago Family) start hunting them down. There is gore, torture, blood and the nasty use of drills aplenty. They receive various warnings from the ghosts of Jesse and Nicole, but they cannot decide whether they are really dead or still in a battle for survival.

The ghost aspect of the tale gives it an extra edge which does lift it above being the standard slasher/torture film. There are some nice twists and turns as you do not really know whether one of the survivors is a ghost or not and the ending hence packs a reasonable wallop.

Characters do tend to be second in many modern slasher films, and the three mains are not especially interesting in this one either. Tom is bland, Marilyn is a bitchy blond and Jared is an extremely annoying geek who was obviously written in for some light relief in what is otherwise a very brutal film. None of them are especially believable, Tom and Marilyn has no real connection and it is hard to see them as a couple and Jared is just plain stupid. The scene when he bonks the very obviously dead Nicole (for god’s sake she has a car rego number carved on her stomach) is just beyond belief.

The gore, torture, bloodshed etc has all been done before and while confronting and brutal adds nothing new. **Rest Stop: Don't Look Back** can be enjoyed by gorehounds as a slasher and there are some creative ideas, but they are not really developed enough to make it truly memorable.

Shrooms R4 DVD & Blu Ray Icon Entertainment

Hallucinogenic mushrooms have always been of interest to those seeking a “psychedelic” experience. They have been used by a diverse range of indigenous peoples in an attempt to experience something beyond the physical from India to Russia and Mexico. R. Gordon Wasson, a well respected Ethnomycologist, believed that the legendary Soma – the elixir of the Gods from the Vedas of India was based on the Fly Agaric Mushroom and that the Eleusinian mysteries of Greece were similarly based.

Others have gone much further arguing for an entheogenic basis for religious experience. Professor John Allegro in his controversial book “The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross” even argued that Christianity began as a mushroom cult !

Shrooms uses the consumption of Hallucinogenic mushrooms to spin a fascinating tale. A group of friends travel to the back lands of Ireland to spend time together and get wasted. As they enter the park, they hit a deer and need to put it down as it clearly cannot be saved. They also meet some of the locals who it seems live off any roadkill they can find, they are not an appealing sight.

Throughout these first scenes is a real sense of the dichotomy between beauty and violence. There is the lush countryside and the open wounds left on the landscape by logging as well as the image of the freedom of nature juxtaposed with the deer killed and then dragged off to be eaten.

The team set up their tents, lock away their mobile phones and settle down to some interpersonal clashes. Jack explains some basic mushroom lore and they carefully look for “safe” mushrooms to consume.

For some reason Tara takes a death’s head mushroom, which unbeknown to her, Jack has



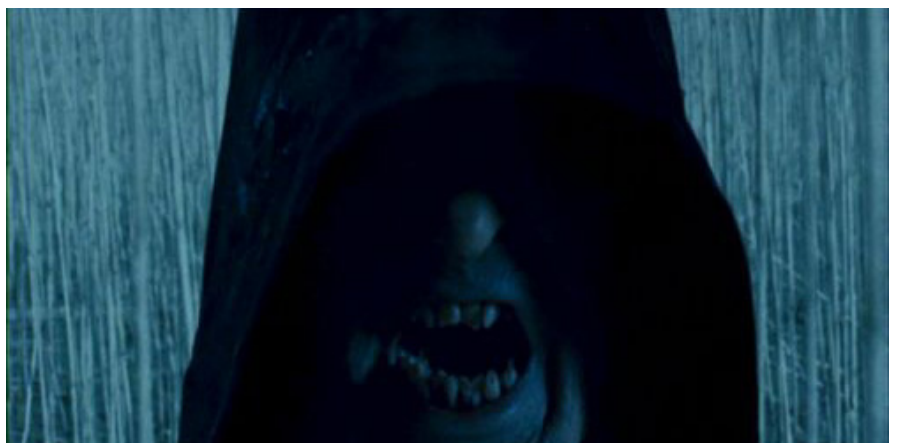
Picking a trip may prove fatal !

explained to the others opens the door to the dead and was used in celebratory rites by the Irish Druids.

Tara's begins to have visions of the future and they are not very nice, she sees the monk stalking them and becomes hysterical and incoherent. The question is what is real and what is just a hallucination. She retired to bed as the rest of them talk around the fire.

As they are relaxing preparing for the next day's inner exploration, Jack spins a ghost tale about a derelict building a short walk away. It seems the building was once a boy's home headed by an order of black cowled monks. They have spent their missionary lives in Africa and returned scarred and disturbed. They treated the boys badly including abuse, torture and even murder. The senior monk carried a cane with a knife imbedded in it and would regularly hang the worst offenders in the store-room claiming they committed suicide.

Ghostly Monk or way too many Shrooms ?





Tara's visions become increasingly disturbed

On one day, the head monk decides to punish two misbehaving twins for throwing rocks at the chapel. He burnt one of the boys face beyond recognition and makes him permanently wear a sack over his head. The other brother he hangs in front of his mutilated twin. As revenge, the young man laced the monk's soup with death's head mushrooms.

He never considers the results, the monks sexual and violent fantasies go out of control and they rape, torture and kill all except a few boys who escape. It is rumoured that the monk and the sack boy still haunt the forest during mushroom season.

This is certainly a dark and compelling twist on the ghost tale which sets a very nasty edge to the possible haunting.

The next day as they consume the mushrooms things begin to get out of control. One of them is missing and Tara's visions become increasingly violent. As the body count increases, one is left wondering who is stalking them.

Shrooms plays over various storylines throughout the film. It is possible that ghosts are really haunting the forest and stalking them, but it is equally likely that the locals could be the source of the trouble. On the other hand, their problems could simply be too many mushrooms.

I like the way these various realities are melded together. We have superb visions of the monk and child, for example, but are they truly ghosts or simply the product of drugged over active imaginations? The locals look dangerous and their description of their sex lives is certainly

perverse but are they actually stalking the team or trying to protect them. When we realize the locals are actually the boys who escaped the home, it seems they are just as scared of the ghostly monk.

The "ghosts" are superbly portrayed and seem to be a mixture of western and Asian cinematic traditions. The monk looks like an Irish cowled monk dressed in black, but moves, crawls and acts like the ghosts from an Asian film, it is a very eerie combination and quite effective.

The look of the film is superb, from the lush forest to the barrenness of the logging, the beauty of the landscape accentuates the horror of what is occurring. The derelict building really is classic stuff, it perfectly looks the part. The careful use of lighting and the long shots down the broken corridors create a constant sense of suspense. You are just waiting for the ghosts (or whatever is stalking them) to jump out and get you.

The mushroom background to the story is creative, it is very different from run of the mill ghost films and allows the filmmaker to play with our experience of reality and leave us guessing right to the very end. At that is my concern, the ending.

When you think the various threads of the plot are about to be brought together in a supernatural tale centred on the old boys home, the film continues and offers a far more mundane climax. The ending is unexpected but I am in two minds about it, yes it "resolves" the various storylines of the film but I also through it took away from the more intriguing facets of the tale.

Regardless of how you view the ending of the film, the movie itself is innovative and inventive; it has a very different approach to horror mixing together hallucinations, visions, a serial killer on the loose, interpersonal clashes and ghosts to create a truly nail biting experience.

It is filled with superb cinematography, weird characters and ultimately proves a very successful work of "new horror" which works to redefine what a slasher/ghost film really is.

THINKING TIME !



8 Wheels and Some Soul Brotha' Music
2003, Re-released.
R1 DVD
Indican Pictures

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

I must admit I approached this film with a certain amount of concern that I was about to waste another couple of hours of my life. A documentary about roller skating, where even the title features that spelling-and grammar-challenged style that seems to be popular today? I finished the film pleasantly surprised, and far better educated in the genre of roller skating than I ever thought I would be.

The first thing I learned was that roller skating went back as far as 1866 (that's before the telephone was invented). The early skates clipped onto shoes and featured massive wooden wheels that could ride over the uneven board surfaces of the early mobile skating rinks. It quickly caught the imagination of the public, although it was mostly confined to skating around in a circle and keeping your balance. It was also a sport mainly for whites, since most blacks couldn't afford skates.

Gradually the black skaters moved into the rinks, usually on nights set aside for them, and a range of styles started to evolve. A major step forward was the addition of music. Any previous musical accompaniment was usually someone playing the organ in the background, but soul music turned out to be the ideal accompaniment. Skaters started to experiment with a form of dance on skates called Jammin'. The rinks became social centers, not always popular with the locals. There was evidence that when a local council closed down a rink, say using noise for an excuse, crime in the neighbourhood went up as a result.

It was partly offset as promoters took over some of the rinks and turned them into well behaved, moneymaking concerns. I had to laugh while watching promoter Big Bob seriously discuss the ethos of skating while counting a very large

wad of money. These promoters, though, played an important role in opening up skating to intercity skate parties, competitions, and roller discos.

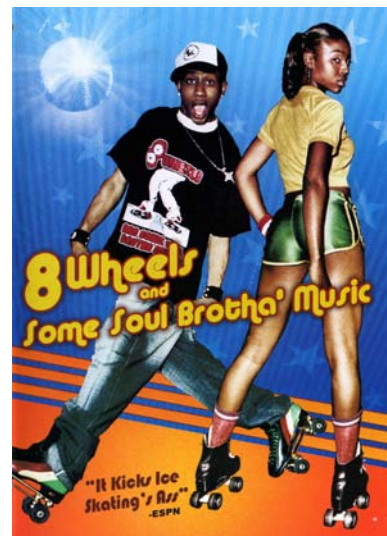
The skating styles continued to evolve. "Steppin' " appears to be line dancing on skates. Simple moves, synchronized to the music, easy for the whole family.

"This is something that's really here" (OK, if it's not "here", where is it?)

By the seventies and eighties it seemed that roller skating had disappeared in the face of freestyle skating, open air skate parks and roller blades. It hadn't really disappeared, it just wasn't as public as the new styles. The newer inline skates were not allowed on the floor, just the old traditional 4-wheel skates which had by now evolved a long way from their wooden-wheeled ancestors. There is a certain elitism expressed by some of the older skaters. They tend to look down on figure skating, speed skating, and freestyle. "The young generation wants to run fast on skates, but they can't skate cause they ain't got no talent".

Then a strange thing happened. Many of the young people started coming back to the rinks. Perhaps it was the music, perhaps it was that their styles of skating were readily accepted by most other skaters.

Dixon's film of a rink on a busy night shows groups of people just circulating on skates enjoying each other's company, groups of skaters practicing and polishing their carefully choreographed semi dance moves, young kids



taking their first tentative steps on skates, skaters well into their seventies, and attractive young ladies wearing their somewhat revealing best skating clothes. It could have been hilarious watching a group of portly over-sixties men doing synchronized dance moves on skates, but they all moved really well and looked absolutely graceful. And EVERYONE WAS SMILING. That seems to be the secret – you do it for fun, it is non-competitive, and you can look good on skates regardless of age and body. I can now see what the appeal is in skating.

Freestyle is widely accepted and appreciated, and there are even competitions occasionally. There is a clip on the film of one young guy doing Michael Jackson-type dance moves and Michael would have been jealous of his grace and smoothness.

As well as a detailed history of skating, Tyrone Dixon has given us a glimpse of the passion of the true skater. What started out as a sedate sport for white people has now become a serious cultural part of the lives of many inner-city black people. They have turned it into something truly amazing.

Derek R4 DVD Madman Entertainment

In voiceover, Derek Jarman's close friend and collaborator Tilda Swinton begins reading "Letter to an Angel", a haunting and enthralling text she wrote in 2002. By then Jarman, one of Britain's most controversial, and at the same time celebrated, artists had been dead for eight years. Derek is a very personal film; it is beautifully produced using a rare and unseen interview with Jarman from 1991 coupled with excerpts from his movies, promos and home movies, specially made pieces and footage of Tilda Swinton to take us on a journey into the unique visionary life of Derek Jarman.

In many ways this is a very sad film as it discusses the difficulties of his childhood, the pain of sexual suppression and living as an opening Gay male who is HIV+ in Thatcher's Britain. At the same time, however, it is kept buoyant by



Jarman's unique sense of humour and acceptance of life as it is. It is also saturated with his unique artist's vision and some superb excerpts from his many films.

We come to understand how Jarman became a filmmaker and artist through his work with Hockney and Patrick Procter and his studio life in Bankside Studio where being Avante-Garde was a way of life. It was here he met Ken Russell and got his first film job as the set designer for the outrageous "**Devils**".

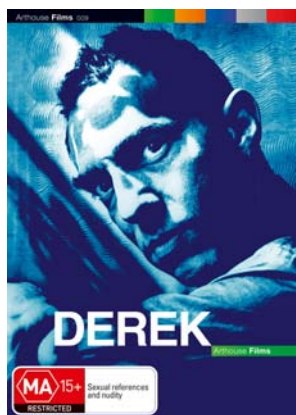
From here Jarman decided to explore film in a new way, taking the approach of a painter and artist rather than as a traditional filmmaker. In 1976 his first film **Sebastiane** became an instant if not controversial success due to its strident homo-erotic theme. It was also one of the only films whose dialogue was in Latin ! He continued to create unusual cinema from **Jubilee**, a punk attack on British hypocrisy to the eccentric life of Edward II.

Jarman, however, was never just "locked" into one medium, he continued to explore painting, multimedia and music, creating videos for The Smiths and Pet Shop Boys. His video for "It's a Sin" is still considered a classic.

He realized his time was limited when diagnosed with AIDS in 1986 and with failing eyesight he continued to work producing a number of intriguing films and to produce artwork when he was confined to his home.

Derek is a superb documentary, which looks like an art-film, which is so fitting considering the life it is documenting. Tilda Swinton's voiceover, at times, is cutting and bitter as it attacks the commercialization of cinema and art and as she yearns not just for a departed friend but for the visionary world he inhabited. Derek is an apt tribute to a great artist as well as a truly unique and heroic soul.

Image © JN Films 2008



Fallen Idol- The Yuri Gagarin Conspiracy
Global Science Productions
R1 DVD
Indican Productions

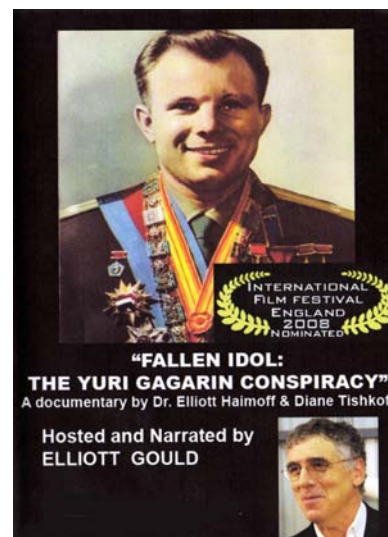
Reviewed: Bob Estreich

Yuri Gagarin was, according to the standard histories, the first man into space. At the time it was a major coup for Russian science. Gagarin became a national hero and spent much of his following life touring the world as an example of what Communism could do. After a while it all started to go subtly wrong as the fame went to his head and he degenerated into alcoholism. Finally he was killed in a plane crash after being allowed to return to duty as a fighter pilot. This film purports to document his history and reveal a huge conspiracy to alter the truth. The film is presented and narrated by a very earnest-looking Elliott Gould, an actor whose claim to fame relevant to this film is that he played an investigative journalist in the 1978 film *Capricorn One*. This film presented the Apollo moon landings as an elaborate PR hoax by NASA. It gave rise to a huge amount of conspiracy theory that the landing was in fact faked. I have looked at a lot of the "evidence", and frankly I just don't see what the conspiracy theorists claim is there. Thus I was slightly skeptical when I watched this film.

It falls into three main areas.

The first segment deals with the Russian paranoia for secrecy, and with only publishing news which was favorable to Communism. It proposes that a test pilot, Vladimir Ilyushin, actually made the first flight. The capsule crashed on landing due to defects in its construction and Ilyushin was badly injured. Because he was unable to stand up in front of the cameras and receive the accolades for his success, it was decided that the flight should be wiped from the histories. The PR machine went into action and a number of conflicting stories were published, many of which lacked credibility. Ilyushin was variously reported as OK, crashed in a test flight, in China receiving acupuncture following a car crash, etc. This is the stuff of conspiracy theories, but little supporting evidence is produced. That which is shown in the film supports the complete mess that the Russians made of the news of Ilyushin's injuries, but does little to support the assertion that he was first into space. The only one who could shed more light on this is Ilyushin, who is shown briefly in the

film walking around a display of an old MIG jet, but he did not comment for the film. According to the producers, they arranged to meet and interview him but he was pressured into saying nothing useful.



This section contains much early historical footage, including some quite spectacular shots as the launchers exploded. The Cold War paranoia is well documented and explained, as is the development of powerful people and families in the post-WW2 U.S.S.R.

The second segment deals with Gagarin. A young barely-trained fighter pilot, he was a trainee in the Cosmonaut program and was selected for the second mission. Considering the rather rough and ready nature of the technology of the time, the mission went off fairly well and Gagarin became a hero. Although the mission was kept quiet until after Gagarin's landing, there is sufficient independent evidence to verify this flight. The telemetry signals from the capsule, including Gagarin's heartbeat, were tracked by, among others, Britain's Jodrell Bank. Gagarin became a hero, a friend of Premier Nikita Khrushchev, and was sent off around the world in a blaze of publicity. Gradually he lost touch with his wife and family, began to drink heavily and womanize, and was finally pushed into the background when Khrushchev was replaced by Premier Leonid Brezhnev. The politics in Russia at this period are interesting, and well explained in the film.

Brezhnev needed some political success to make his reputation, and he badly wanted to return Russia to the forefront of space achievements. It was two years since a manned flight had been made and the Americans were catching up. Unfortunately the new Soyuz launch vehicle had a bad habit of blowing up at launch. Four test flights so far had ended in explosions. The fifth flight was scheduled to carry a Cosmonaut, Komorov, who was a friend of Gagarin's.



Gagarin and Komorov raised the defects of the launch vehicle and the capsule to their superiors, but the mission went ahead anyway under political pressure. The capsule was under ground control, but the controls failed and Komorov had to take manual control. He successfully managed the re-entry but the parachutes failed to deploy and the capsule crashed. Komorov was killed. The official story was that he was killed in a bus crash on his way to Moscow for the celebrations.

Gagarin fell apart mentally after this and became something of an embarrassment to the Communist Party powers. The film suggests that the death of his friend and his knowledge that he was not really the first man in space but was a fraud got to him and unbalanced him. The Party did not want a loose cannon around who knew the details of the space program's failures. The film postulates that Gagarin was returned to active fighter service in spite of his increasing age, poor health and lack of recent training. The KGB staged a plane crash that killed both him and his co-pilot. Gagarin's body apparently was never found. The investigation that followed was brief and, according to the film, a cover-up. "No independent investigation was ever carried out" – why would it be? The investigators were from the Air Force, the manufacturer, and a test pilot – a competent investigation team. The fragments of the crashed plane are still apparently kept in sealed drums in a locked room of a warehouse. Why is not explained.

The third part of the film deals with the U.S. involvement in the Ilyushin and Gagarin missions. The U.S., quite naturally, would have been interested in the Russian progress and tracked the progress of each launch and mission. The film mentions a tracking station at remote Tern Island in the Pacific Ocean that recorded the sig-

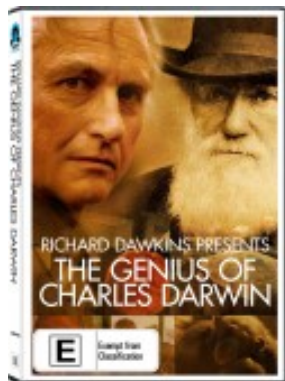
nals from Ilyushin's capsule. Gould quotes assertions from an unnamed engineer at the base that the telemetry indicated the cosmonaut was alive and under great stress. This engineer was allegedly leaned on by U.S. authorities and threatened with imprisonment if he talked to the producers. Why is not explained. A mysterious warehouse full of space-technology parts is shown, and it is suggested that some of the consoles are from the Tern Island establishment. So what? The warehouse also contains something which Gould introduces as a genuine console from a Russian Soyuz capsule. Very careless of the Russians to lose this, and a strange place to store it. If the U.S. got a console, wouldn't their engineers have torn it apart to examine it? If this warehouse is so important and secret, why were they allowed to film reenactments in it? This is unexplained. Much of this section seems irrelevant to the film except to try to suggest U.S. Government involvement in the cover-up. Why? The U.S. would have more to gain by exposing it. The tapes and transcripts of the received telemetry are, in best conspiracy theory tradition, blocked from release under the Freedom of Information Act on the basis of "national security".

Overall I found the evidence for the conspiracy theory largely unsupported and unconvincing. There are a lot of inferences drawn from limited information and conflicting propaganda, little corroboration, and a somewhat weak attempt to suggest that the U.S. somehow participated in the cover-up. I had a look at Global Science Productions and found that they seem to be deeply involved in producing space conspiracy theory documentaries. "Apollo 13: The Untold Story", "Apollo 12: Uncensored", and "Behind The Race To The Moon" are examples. Dr Haimoff seems to have something of a fetish for government conspiracies.

On the other hand, the film gives a human touch to the protagonists. The state of politics and space technology in Russia during the Cold War is well explained, and the reasoning for some of the film's allegations is at least more plausible as a result. There is a massive collection of historical footage that fills in the life, fall from grace and death of Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space.

The film is in 1080i High-def, however, since most of the footage is old documentary and newsreel film, largely in original unenhanced condition, don't expect too much quality.

The Genius of Charles Darwin
R4 DVD
Siren Visual



The Genius of Charles Darwin is Richard Dawkins' tour de force, offering a whistle stop tour of Darwinism. It is expressed in easy to understand language and makes a complex and difficult subject comprehensible as well as entertaining. The series opens with Dawkins attempting to discuss evolution with a class of high school students. Each having their own personal religious and superstitious ideas. At first he seems to make little headway as they are unable to grasp even rudimentary critical thinking.

However, when he shows them physical proof of fossils by taking them to a beach which they can find them for themselves, they start to consider the hard proof that modern science offers. Dawkins then proceeds to offer an exhilarating outline of evolutionary science, interspersed with details about Charles Darwin's life and how he made his most significant discoveries. What is impressive about this episode is that he doesn't "dumb down the subject" but covers the complexity of evolution including natural selection and genetics, in extensive detail. At the same time he presents it in a way that can be easily understood. This is quite some achievement!

In part two Dawkins explores the "Dark Side of Darwinism" and this is a truly challenging and informative episode. Dawkins does not avoid the difficult questions which are the result of the

Richard Dawkins



Darwinist worldview including the concept of survival of the fittest, might is right and Social Darwinism. He also considers how altruism and compassion develop within the Darwinian model. In my mind this is one of the most informative documentaries I have ever seen on this subject.

While there have been many documentaries on the theory of evolution, this is one of the first to face the ethical ramifications of the evolutionary model head-on. It also offers a comprehensive rebuttal to those who twist evolutionary science to create a vicious "Social Darwinist" "might is right" worldview. We also get an excellent overview of the genetics of evolution and the concept of the "Selfish Gene".

In the third episode Dawkins faces off against the world of religion and superstition. As a proudly avowed atheist, he makes it clear that evolutionary theory is not only undeniable fact (with as much evidence as gravity) but that it pervasively does away with the need not only for god but for any supernatural agency.

He also confronts the distortions of scientific fact used by creationists and the proponents of so-called Intelligent Design. Dawkins explores the danger of brainwashing children with religious beliefs. He also takes aim at an educational system which in the spirit of post modern relativism feels the need to make excuses for not teaching the ramifications of the scientific method and allowing religious beliefs to be seen as valid alternative "ways of knowing".

This is an impressive series, offering an erudite summary of evolution, witty and sharp observations about modern life, ethics and morality, timely criticism of religion and superstition and an excellent overview of the life of Charles Darwin.

Personally I found this one of the most insightful documentaries on evolution and its philosophical ramifications I have ever seen.

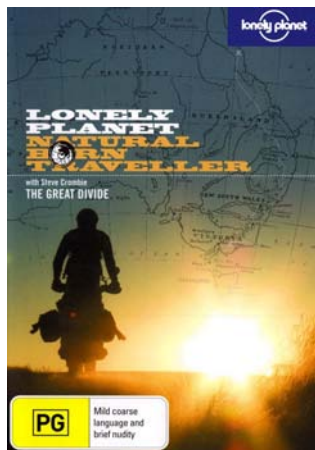
As an atheist, I am pleased to find a doco which helps communicate the value of science and the theory of evolution in a challenging but easy to understand manner.

I highly recommend it to anyone wishing to have a deeper understanding of the world and our place within it (and that should be absolutely everyone !)

**Lonely Planet:
The Great Divide
R4 DVD
Beyond Home
Entertainment**

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Steve Crombie has a dream to cross each of the continents on his motorbike. In this series, he starts in his home country of Australia.



The series chronicles his trip from Mount Sterling in Victoria, north along the Great Dividing Range to Helensvale in the far north of Queensland where the Range peters out in the flat lands around the Gulf of Carpentaria.

First, a brief geography lesson. The east coast of Australia is dominated by the Great Dividing Range, a low range of mountains that follows the east coast between ten and fifty miles inland, from the cool alpine lands in the south to the dense rainforests of the north. Although there are decent highways along the coast and even along much of the Divide, Crombie, traveling on a motorbike, gets to travel to parts that most tourists will never see.

He also talks to many of the quirky locals that prefer to live in the small mountain towns. He has about forty days to complete the trip, because the "Wet", the northern monsoonal wet season, will start about then and the roads will become impassable.

One advantage of traveling by bike soon becomes obvious – the scenery off the main roads is magnificent and unspoiled, and the unnamed cinematographers have captured some of the most beautiful parts of Australia.

Crombie interrupts his trip to talk to the locals in many places. Rounding up cattle in the High Plains of Mt Koszciuszko, the highest part of the Divide, learning to ride a wild bull, capturing a three metre snake, or canyoning in the Blue Mountains – experiences that most people will never have.

There are also the local "characters" as well. The hippies from the commune town of Nimbin interview him on their local radio station – in the

nude. He meets a semi-retired manager of a boxing tent show – "I have a reputation as dirty fighter – somebody hits me and I shit myself". Crombie himself does not seem to be a natural presenter, but he lets the people do most of the talking. He also shows respect for the traditions of the Aboriginal tribes and their culture, who feature prominently in the various episodes.

Perhaps it is this lack of professional skill that makes the show look so natural. It is not just a tourist show, but a closer look at the country.

I quite enjoyed it, and my only criticism is that at four half-hour episodes it was too short.

Special features include Customise Your Bike for Adventure Travel A Video Diary with Steve Crombie.

**Mythbusters
Impossible Heists
Beyond Productions
R4 DVD**

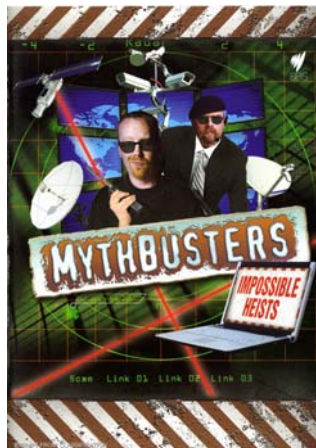
Mythbusters has been running now on Australia's SBS and an increasing number of world TV stations for five seasons. For those who haven't yet seen it, the show examines and tests urban myths and legends and, as in this DVD, Hollywood special effects.

Is there a grain of truth in there in all the hype? If it is just a special effect, what would it take to recreate it in real life? The myths and effects are rated as Busted, Plausible, or Confirmed.

Jamie Hyneman and Adam Savage



The testing may involve, with luck, big explosions. The presenters are Jamie Hyneman and Adam Savage, who have been doing special effects for years and are well placed to comment on the excesses of Hollywood.



This DVD looks at the security systems featured in films like Mission Impossible. Are they realistic? Can they be beaten? With the help of viewers' suggestions, they test Fingerprint Scanners, Thermal, Ultrasonic and Motion detectors, and safecracking. Some results are quite surprising. Some are almost predictable – when the Mythbusters are given a safe to crack, you just know there's going to be a big explosion in the end.

A second DVD is included which looks at a competition between Jamie and Adam to see who is "The Ultimate Mythbuster". Who can use a small box full of odd items to drop an egg 26 feet without breaking it? Or throw a tortilla the furthest? They must use their mechanical ingenuity, knowledge of physics, and experience.

This is another great DVD from a great TV series, and it's well worth watching. It's inoffensive yet irreverent and gives Hollywood films the serve they deserve.

Oz and James Drink to Britain
RDF Media Group, BBC
Acorn Media
R2 DVD

Seven Episodes

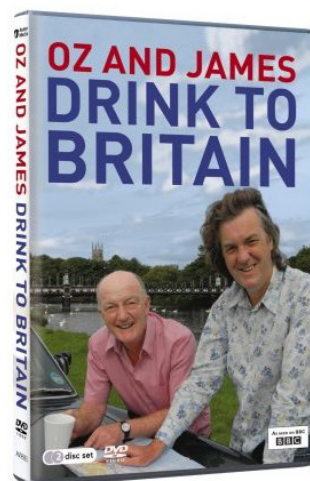
Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Perhaps this should be called "Oz and James Get Half Pissed Around Britain", in the interests of Truth In Advertising. James May (Captain Slow to Top Gear fans) and Oz Clarke ("International Wine Ponce" to James) cruise around Britain and Ireland in a Rolls Royce (naturally) towing a caravan, in search of a true British beer.

It sounds boring, but the pair are actually quite funny in their own laid back way, bouncing hap-

pily off each other in a slightly fuddled way.

They get even more laid back after a few more beers. Oz seems to have a lot of trouble with pronouncing many words in the English language, and James looks even more like a badly-groomed spaniel than usual.



We also get to see rather more than I liked of James' hideous blue and pink striped shirt that he favours for Top Gear, and Oz seems to have far more pink in his wardrobe than any reasonable man should be allowed.

This Series follows on from two earlier ones, in which Oz introduced James to the world of wine. James initially is less than amused.

"You'll make beer complicated for me - just like you've made wine!"

We learn an awful lot about beer and its history. Their meandering course takes them through microbreweries, home brewers, modern brewing factories, and all the other sub-industries associated with beer

Oz teaches James the beer-tasting equivalent of wine-talk. It sounds just as pompous when applied to beer, although a little harder to understand after lots of pints.

One memorable episode involves a pub crawl by train to three consecutive railway stations whose refreshment rooms still serve beer. The results can be imagined, but the reality is still not pretty. Neither is their episode drinking Guinness.

There is, of course, the compulsory challenge in which each of them must make their own typical British beer. As an Australian, I thought they could have set their sights a bit higher than that.

We won't go into it, except to say that James cheats and imports a German micro-brewing machine, but gets his come-uppance when the instructions turn out to be written, not surprisingly, in German.

Unfortunately Oz, being a wine buff, can't help tracking down vineyards and whisky, gin, cider, and vodka producers along the way. In fact, producers of anything alcoholic.

James is pretty good at jumping in for samples, so Oz usually finishes up having to drive the Rolls.

The series shows a side of James May that I never suspected from Top Gear. It's fun, it's slightly educational, and it's a lesson in just how hard it is to make a good beer.

**Red Bull Air Race
World Championship
IMG
Beyond Home Enter-
tainment
R4 DVD**

When I was in my teens, about a hundred years ago, I used to enjoy watching Pylon Racing on TV. This involved intrepid (or insane) pilots in ex-World War 2 fighter planes flying very quickly over the Arizona desert around a course a few miles long, round a steel mast at each end. The races were incredibly fast and dangerous, run at altitudes low enough to part the hair of the coyotes, and the slightest error meant explosive flaming death. The Red Bull race is the modern equivalent.

The planes are no longer fighters, but their ancestry is obvious. The sleek lines, the massive power from the engines, the incredible maneuverability – these are still the same. The names have changed. Instead of Mustangs, Thunderbolts and Corsairs we now have specialty aircraft like MXS and Edge.

The course is no longer an oval track, but a series of gates and chicanes through which a pilot must complete three laps. At the end of each lap he must pull the aircraft up and over, then roll out 180 degrees and repeat the lap in the other direction. During this "half-Cuban" as it is called, the pilots and aircraft can regularly pull over 9 G's. This is incredibly stressful on the plane and pilot. The races rarely exceed 90 seconds for the three laps, requiring speeds around 370 KMH, and it is incredible watching the pilots flip their aircraft from wingtip to wingtip to navigate the gates at these speeds. No WW2 fighter was



ever as agile as this. The pylons are now huge inflatable fabric towers, which is just as well since contact with them is common. This earns the pilot a 10-second penalty, enough to take them out of the race. Penalties also apply for entering the chicanes too low or too high. The races are held over water at different venues around the world, and crowds of 750,000 are common.

The doco contains many in-aircraft shots and the stress on the pilots is obvious. There are also many through-the-windshield shots as the planes negotiate the course and these give a far better idea of the speed and agility of the aircraft. The pilots readily give interviews and although they are highly competitive in flight, in their interviews they readily give credit to their opponents for a good round.

The film is a good watch for excitement, thrills, and speed – it is after all the world's fastest motor sport. Enjoy it.

Web: <http://www.redbullairrace.com>

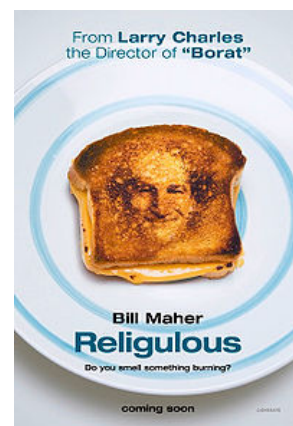
**Religulous
Bill Maher
R1 DVD**

The word Religulous was coined by Maher as a blend of the two words "religion" and "ridiculous".

As a work of cinema **Religulous** is hard to classify – it is a documentary, a comedy, a commentary and a tour of religious insanity worldview. Bill Maher is a highly successful stand-up comedian and after some years of reflection on religion realized the breathtaking stupidity of believing such superstition and became an atheist.

Religulous is his exploration of religious beliefs and certainly packs in the laughs, while at the same time reflecting deeply on why people can believe such incredible inane things.

There are many ways to try and stimulate people to use critical thinking about religion. Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and others tend to use science and education, Maher realizes the value of humour and uses ridicule to great effect.





Bill Maher at the Holy Land theme park which the Bible meets US capitalism.

The director of **Religulous** is Larry Charles who also directed **Borat**. He has a knack of choosing the right people to interview. He realizes that with certain people if you “give them enough rope they will hang themselves” and they certainly do that with amazing regularity. It is frightening to hear what these people really think when only a little pressure is applied. From the US congressman who admits “there is no IQ test to get into congress” to Moslems who demand free speech to advocate Jihad but justify the Fatwa issued against Salman Rusdie. There is even a ex-Jew for Jesus who would welcome a nuclear attack as it is a sign of the end times and brings him closer to his Lord. To be honest so many of them sound so bloody stupid it is unbelievable.

As Maher rightly observes it seems to incredible that normal and average thinking people could believe in a god who incarnates himself on earth as his own son, has himself killed, brings himself back from the dead and has his death celebrated every Sunday by a rite of divine cannibalism.

While the film was well received and was surprisingly successful at the box office there were mixed reviews. The primary criticism was that Maher did not treat religious figures with respect.

Personally I find such criticism misguided, Maher sees preachers, pastors and other related kin as flim-flam salesman. They are selling a product which nobody can see never mind prove. Products such as life after death, heaven and hell, and love from an invisible friend for life are such winners as they make the buyer feel good but cost nothing to produce. The downside to buying into such a product is the loss of rationality and self respect.

Any other salesman selling such a product would be charged with fraud so why give respect to those who prey on the weak, sick and emotionally challenged.

Too often people play down the obvious intellectual contradictions in religion by arguing that faith is a force for good. Yet any critical examination of the history of religion, from the mainstream to the alternative, monotheistic to pagan, shows a history of violence and bloodshed. The sheer amount of terror which has been evoked throughout the ages both through direct violence and psychological abuse by religion should be enough to convince even the most devoted “person of faith” that the cost of religion is a price way too high to pay.

There are some moments of sheer theatre in **Religulous** such as the bizarre Creation Museum or the Holy Land theme park, one could also add Maher being thrown out of the Vatican and off Mormon property. I especially loved when he told an “ex-gay” preacher that he still looked gay and when he hugged him goodbye asked if he got a hard-on ! His own screen notes “clarifying” various conversations also make very funny reading, though I am sure they do not amuse those who now see themselves ridiculed on the big screen !

It would be fair to say **Religulous** is “preaching to the converted”, the pure venom of the commentary, the slanted nature of the questions and the presentation of the program is clearly based on an atheist worldview.

I certainly couldn’t see any religious person sitting through it. However, it may prove of value to those who are “nominally” religious or “Sunday Christians” who need a jolt to reconsider the superstitions they hold so dearly and the cost of holding such outmoded beliefs.

While **Religulous** is funny, nasty, venomous and incisive, the ending is reflective and powerful. As Maher so rightly notes, religious beliefs have brought man to the edge of an abyss. The End times may be near but not because Jesus is about to return, but because religious extremists will use any means whatsoever to enforce their values on the world.

Clearly it is time we wake up and smell the bullshit before it is too late.

WORLD CINEMA



4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days
2007

Romanian, subtitled in English
Human drama
Producer: Oleg Mutu
Director Cristian Mungiu
Artificial Eye
R2 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

The scene is Rumania in the closing years of the Communist regime. Otilia (Anamaria Marinca) is a student in a technical school, and shares a room with her naïve, scatterbrained friend Gabita (Laura Vasiliu). Gabita is pregnant. Abortion is outlawed but Gabita must take the risk. She is well over four months pregnant, but has told Otilia that she is about two months gone. Otilia contacts a local abortionist, the rather mysterious Mr Bebe (Vlad Ivanov). They arrange to meet in a hotel room where the abortion will be carried out and Gabita will recover. Because Gabita is losing her grip as the time approaches, Otilia is begging, borrowing or bartering for the necessities of life for their stay in the hotel. She is having her own problems with her boyfriend and leaves some of the arrangements to Gabita, who screws them up. The chosen hotel, preferred by Mr Bebe because of its discretion, has no reservation for them. Otilia must arrange a room in another hotel, and fight the petty bureaucracy of the hotel management to get even that. Gabita cannot face meeting Mr Bebe, so Otilia must arrange that as well. This will require her to cut short a birthday party for her boyfriend's mother. Gabita has even left the necessary plastic sheet behind. Otilia must also later clean up the mess and dispose of the foetus. She is increasingly exasperated at her friend's lies and general refusal to help herself, but continues to support her.

Mr Bebe is not impressed. Neither are the girls when they learn that as well as paying Bebe for the abortion, he expects them both to have sex with him. Otilia sacrifices her dignity and agrees, to get her friend out of trouble. Bebe checks Gabita's condition and the lie about the length of her pregnancy is revealed. Bebe points out that

if the foetus is more than four months old, the crime they can be charged for is not abortion, but murder. The risk of problems and infection is great at that late stage.

After Bebe has had sex with both girls he carries out the abortion and leaves them with detailed instructions about aftercare. Otilia leaves the hotel to dispose of the foetus. On her return, Gabita has gone missing. She turns up in the hotel dining room, unrepentant, where she has ordered a late meal because she was hungry. She has also managed to take antibiotics instead of aspirin for the fever she is developing. How much more can Otilia take for her friend?

The film is one of the most dismal I have seen for a while. The city is seedy and run down, shortages are evident everywhere, the girls appear to face an uncertain future even after they finish their studies. There is no contraception and little medical care. The bureaucracy has taken over everywhere. The Communist world of the film is stark, brutal and uncaring. In spite of this, there is a certain element of human spirit that requires that you take care of your friends.

Director Mungiu decided to make a serious movie, focusing on the problems of life under the Communist regime. In this he succeeded, but still left room for hope of improvement if the people are up to it. The film won a number of prizes, particularly at Cannes. The DVD has a good range of extras including interviews with the director, Anamaria Marinca, and the producer; "The Romanian Tour" featurette; plus alternate and deleted scenes (Mungiu rewrote parts of the script a number of times while filming)..



The Ballad of Narayama

Director:

Shohei Imamura

AnimEigo

Human drama.

R1 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich



In a little village high in the mountains of Japan, there has been a law for many years – when a person reaches 70 years old, they must “go to the mountain”. They will be carried to the top of nearby Mount Narayama and left to die of exposure. This is a necessary survival move in a village which can barely support its population, and must sometimes leave boy babies out to die of exposure. Girls can at least be sold off. The village simply can’t afford to support its elderly through the bitter winters, when the whole village faces starvation if there is a bad harvest. This year it is Grandma Orin’s time, but before she goes to the mountain there are some things she must do.

Her eldest son Tatsuhei must be found a new wife. He is lonely since his old wife died, so Orin arranges a new wife for him from a neighbouring village. There is something vaguely wrong about the woman – they are not sure if she left the village voluntarily or was kicked out. In spite of this, Grandma Orin teaches her all she can about keeping the house going and feeding the family. The woman gradually earns her trust and Orin passes on her secrets about how to make the most out of their life.

Her son also has a dark secret. He confesses to Orin that long ago while on a hunting trip he shot his drunken, womanizing father and buried the body. Orin had put up with her husband’s habits to avoid bringing shame on the family, and she does not seem unduly disturbed by the information about his death. She puts her son’s mind at rest.

There is trouble brewing in the village. The potato harvest is very small this year and some villagers are on the verge of starvation. The Ayama family is suspected of stealing food, and Orin quietly stirs up the villagers so they raid the house one night. Plenty of food is found, and it is obvious that the Ayamas have been digging young potatoes from the village fields then hiding them away. The whole Ayama family is

beaten and buried alive, including the children and the girlfriend of one of Orin’s sons. Their food is shared out and it will let the village barely survive for another winter.

Another son, nicknamed Stinker by the village because of his unfortunate hygiene, is suffering from virginity and the lack of a wife. He is one of the Yakka, the unmarried men, and is becoming troublesome. He is reduced to taking his pleasure with a neighbour’s female dog and is a source of embarrassment to his family. He is becoming a troublemaker in the village. Orin arranges for a youngish local widow to satisfy him for one night. The results are rather surprising.

Finally Grandma Orin decides that, with winter approaching fast, it is time for her to go up the mountain. She will follow the village tradition, since it is for the survival of her family. Not everyone goes peacefully to the mountain, but with her work done she is satisfied. After a long and dangerous trip, Tatsuhei leaves her praying peacefully. On the way down the mountain it starts to snow. This symbolically shows the favour of the God of the Mountain to this tough old woman and will give her a painless death through hypothermia.

It seems a brutal existence, and a brutal film about it, but after a while you can’t help but see the necessity for such traditions. Life must go on, but as the village grows it can’t support the extra mouths to feed. The sacrifice of the elderly to make food available for the young is the only way the village can survive. Shohei Imamura doesn’t make judgments about this, he just presents the village traditions as they are and lets us decide for ourselves. It is hard not to have respect for Grandma Orin and her acceptance of the old harsh traditions.

The film is brilliantly acted. It has won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival as well as a number of other awards. The awards were well deserved. In the 1984 Japanese Academy Awards Ken Ogata won Best Actor for his role as Tatsuhei, although I particularly liked the actor who played Risuke (Stinker). There are sex scenes and nudity, but these are all just part of the earthy existence of these people. For a story about survival in a difficult environment, this is one of the best I have seen.

The DVD is presented in Japanese with clear English subtitles.

Battle of Okinawa
Toho Co, Ltd
R1 DVD
AnimEigo

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Originally released 1971
Supplemented, translated and subtitled 2007
Director: Kihachi Okamoto
Language: Japanese
Subtitled in English in yellow on black.

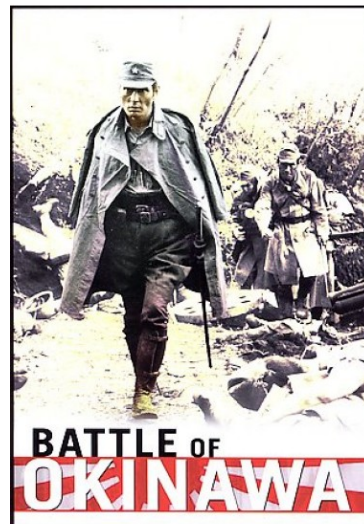
The invasion of Okinawa by U.S. forces towards the end of World War 2 gave rise to one of the bloodiest battles of the Pacific. Okinawa was part of the Japanese homeland and it could be expected that they would fight to defend it. In terms of human life, the cost was tremendous. To some extent the Japanese High Command was counting on this to deter the U.S. from invading the islands of mainland Japan itself.

The film begins with a documentary of mostly historical footage setting the scene. It covers the allocation of troops to Okinawa and the early ineffective preparations for defence. The battalions assigned to the island existed pretty much on paper only, having been weakened in earlier phases of the war. The High Command ignored this and placed impossible demands on the island's Commander. Instead of building the airfields the High Command wanted, he realized he barely had enough troops to prepare defensive positions for the anticipated invasion.

The High Command replaced him with a more active Commander, and allocated veteran troops to the island in adequate numbers. The airfields were built, but after their completion many troops were stripped from the island to support actions elsewhere, such as the Philippines and Taiwan. Once again the island and its 500,000 civilians were left only lightly defended, and with no air or naval support at all.

At this point the film changes to reenactment and dramatization. The story is mostly seen from the viewpoint of the island command officers, struggling to make the out of touch High Command understand their problems. Token attempts were made to supply reinforcements, but when the invasion finally came as predicted by the island command, the defence was totally inadequate. Instead of fighting the in-

vaders at the beach head, soldiers of the weakened 32nd Army sat in their defensive positions and waited for the enemy to come into range of their guns. War Correspondent Ernie Pyle later commented that the troops landed without getting their feet wet.



The High Command issued increasingly irrelevant and confusing orders, and appeared quite willing to sacrifice Okinawa to save troops for mainland defence. The island command was increasingly ignored and isolated.

As the invaders gradually spread over the island the civilians were encouraged to withdraw into the mountains in the north and south to leave the island's center empty for the coming battle. Many young students, male and female, volunteered to serve with the Army. The patriotism angle is stressed, as is the bravery of the Japanese soldiers in the face of superior troops and equipment. A memorable scene is a young soldier carrying a backpack bomb up to a U.S. tank and placing it so the tank runs over it.

The tragedy now begins to unfold, as the ill-prepared Army is forced steadily back towards the south.

The Americans have complete air superiority over the island, and a huge fleet offshore to block Japanese reinforcements.





This fleet was a tempting target for the Japanese Navy, who sent most of their remaining capital ships (including the huge battleship Yamato) to attack the Americans. Most of the fleet was destroyed by air attack and the Navy was unable to ever again mount a major naval operation.

The only real successes were the kamikaze air attacks against the U.S. carriers, and it is here that the concept of dying honourably for the Emperor is first raised. It is to be a recurring theme as things get worse. Rather daringly for a Japanese film on this subject, some of the soldiers question the need to die.

They are treated with contempt, but the idea of suicide before surrender is becoming entrenched among the civilians who are sharing the bunkers with the soldiers. From here, most of the story now deals with how the civilians survive or die in the war.

The American soldiers are faceless, anonymous. They are savage, and there are examples of civilians being killed by bombs before they can surrender. This could be seen as propaganda, but such things did happen. It was a result of the Japanese soldiers pretending to surrender and then letting off a hand grenade when in range of the enemy troops. This is also covered in the film.

The director seems to draw no conclusions from these actions, he just shows them as a fact of war. He also shows some of the brief moments of black comedy and human compassion, but these are few and far between in such an environment.

The real tragedy, and one that fills the final minutes of the film, is the bloody death of so many civilians we have met throughout the film. Whether through enemy gunfire or through their own suicide, there are few survivors.

Reportedly the Army encouraged or forced sui-

cide among the population, rather than the voluntary suicides shown in the film.

The bitter scenes filmed by U.S. soldiers of civilians and their children leaping to their death from the island's cliffs are left out. Regardless, in war it is always the civilians that suffer the most and director Okamoto makes sure this point is hammered in – well over 100,000 civilians died in the battle.

He also shows the collapse in morale when the students, so proud when they decided to help the Army (this point is also in contention with historians – were they volunteers or were they forced to enlist?) are hopelessly unable to cope when the Army has ceased to exist. Their growth in fatalism is their replacement for patriotism betrayed.

In this respect it is a very sad film, and although it looks like a documentary it is really a very powerful anti-war film. There have been comments about the Japanese trying to rewrite history to lessen the effects of losing the war on the Japanese national psyche, but I see little evidence of it here apart from the incidents mentioned, even though the original film has been added to recently.

It is simply a tragic but compelling look at war from the losing side. The final image of a small child survivor searching for water among the bodies is a poignant summary of what the film is about, and perhaps a symbol of Japan's immediate future.

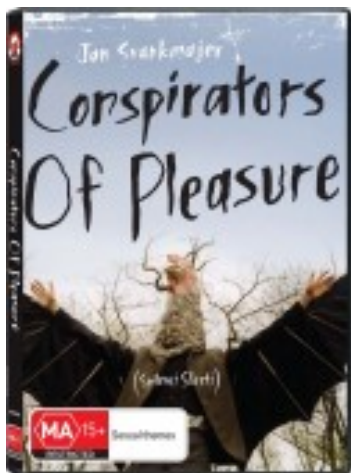
The DVD has been fully restored from the original, and quality is good, apart from the rather poor sound quality. This could have been re-worked.

One touch I liked was the dual subtitles – the bottom subtitles show the speech, but an extra band of subtitles at the top explains or translates any terms that may be confusing or lost in translation. The film runs for two and a half hours, so an intermission break has been thoughtfully provided.

The DVD includes the usual image gallery, notes and trailer. Strangely, there are no credits at the end of the film.

**Conspirators of
Pleasure**
Jan Svankmajer
Siren Visual
R4 DVD

**Conspirators of
Pleasure**
(Spilenci Slasti)
is a very unusual
film. It is a journey
into the world of
human sexuality
and fetishism ex-
pressed through
the medium of surrealism. It is the third film from
this heralded Czech animator, puppeteer and
artist and is an unusual break from his usual
style. Svankmajer is best known for his use of
claymation, marionettes, puppets and dolls and
yet in **Conspirators of Pleasure** the emphasis
is on real actors, though he uses animations
and some artificial characters from about 45
minutes onward to explore how the characters
perceive their own auto erotic world.



This is a film without dialogue, it uses six actors,
each who is isolated from the world around
them and fulfils their sexual and emotional
needs through bizarre and unusual forms of
auto-eroticism. These are not your traditional
forms of fetishism; they are kinky in new and
extreme ways. There is Mr. Peony, a man who
dresses as a chicken and fantasizes about kill-
ing Mrs. Loubalova with a large rock and Mrs.
Loubalova, who fantasizes about dominating Mr.
Peony through enforced submission and drown-
ing him. We also have a policeman who steals
all manner of goods (condoms, nails, paddles,
buckets etc) and creates sex toys to stimulate
himself.

There is also Mr. Kula who is in love with a
news reader and turns his television into a ro-
botic masturbation device. At the same time we
also have Mrs. Beltinska, the news reader who
uses fish to suck her toes and Mrs. Malkova, the
post woman who rolls bread into small balls
and puts them in her ears, nose and throat !

The fetishes are superbly presented, we see Mr.
Peony ask his neighbour to slaughter a chicken.
He cooks it, keeps it blood and uses the carcass
as a model to construct a papier-mache chicken
head from torn-up pornographic photos. The
outfit is remarkably bizarre – he even fashions
bird like wings out of umbrellas he has cut up.



Mr. Peony as the Chicken Predator

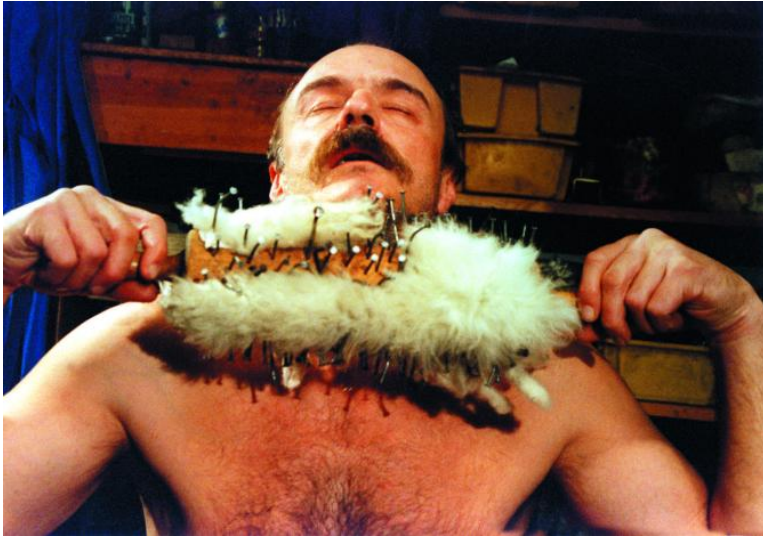
He then makes a doll in the form of Mrs. Loubalova and takes it out into the countryside where he takes the form of a predator chicken which attacks her and kills her in some sort of sado-masochistic rite.

Mrs. Loubalova has a similar lust for Mr. Peony, however, she plays it out a bit differently. She uses an abandoned Church where she dresses in bondage gear and whips and degrades Mr. Peony until she finally drowns him to satisfy her cravings.

All of these characters begin the film as separate individuals but slowly we see how their various lives interconnect and how their fetishes feed each other. The perspective of the film also moves from an "objective" view of each of the fetishists, to seeing it through their eyes.

This is where Svankmajer's animations come in, the dolls made by Peony and Loubalova come to life and we "experience" their fetish world as though it is real. Mr. Peony flying around like a predator chicken is suitably weird.

The climax of the film is intriguing as we slowly see the fetishes move from being isolated private experiences, to interacting with others (with the fetishes interchanging between the participants) to becoming real. The final scene is where Mrs. Loubalova is found dead, killed by a huge stone which has crashed through her roof – one identical to Mr. Peony's dramatic fantasy.



Another strange way to get off !

The production values of the film are certainly different. There is no dialogue and the soundtrack is unusual. The emphasis is placed on using isolated pieces of music for effect intermixed with deliberately focused sound effects. There is no overarching musical score. The effect of this is to bring our attention to each sound and musical piece and these are used for very specific purposes.

For example, when Mrs. Loubalova kills Mr. Peony's chicken and he sits below her collecting the blood, the music is religious and emphasizes the quasi-communion like nature of the scene. While Mrs. Malkova's strange bread fetish is accompanied by Indian music and a white light to emphasize its quasi yogic significance. There are also regular sounds which are used in highly eroticized manners such as eating, drinking etc.

The same emphasis is placed on the use of everyday objects, tubes of glues, brushes, tools – all become eroticized. A prime example is when Mr. Peony is looking at an adult magazine and making a drink for himself, it "fizzes" over and covers the page with white splotches and leaves it wet – a superbly explicit image, yet one created with a drink !

Svankmajer claims his influences in this film were Sigmund Freud, Max Ernst, Luis Bunuel and the Marquis de Sade and hence the focus is on the perversity of everyday life.

He shows people who are average and normal on the outside, such as a policeman, news-reader, postman and a newspaper seller etc. And yet these same individuals, isolated from

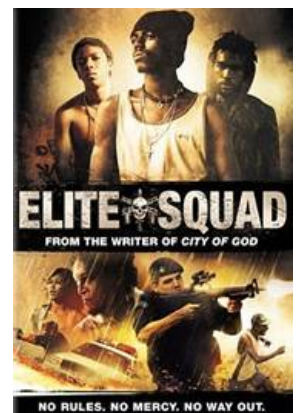
others, create elaborate and frenzied sexual fantasies for themselves. While they do not recognize each other, each being suspicious of other human beings and especially those around them, they are all connected and moreover, each have an effect on each other. In the end this effect turns deadly.

This is a very unusual film, beautifully filmed, uniquely creative in its use of animation, sound, symbols and images. The characters are superbly developed and the way in which its mixture of sexuality and fetish are utilized to create a scathing satire about everyday life is truly astounding.

Elite Squad Tropa De Elite Reel DVD R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Spanish with subtitles



This Brazilian film is undoubtedly the most savage police movie I have seen since **Mad Max**, but it's far more real. It caused controversy in Brazil when it was first released by pirates and raised the Government's anger when it depicted a side of Brazil that they would rather not acknowledge. It also highlights for those of us in our reasonably secure Western world that there are countries where an honest police force is not taken for granted.

Rio de Janeiro has more than 170 slums, known as favelas. These are generally ruled by drug lords and their well-armed gangs. Against them is a police force which is demoralized, under-equipped, and as a result largely corrupt. The police and the drug lords have reached an accommodation which sees the police doing little to combat crime, especially if it is drug-related, and supplementing their poor pay with bribes and protection rackets.

The only non-corrupt group is the Police Force's BOPE, the Elite Group of the title. They are heavily armed, their training is paramilitary, and they are sent into the favelas when the local police cannot control the violence. Their tactics are vicious – they are, after all, fighting a



war against heavily armed opposition. The story is narrated by Captain Nascimento (Wagner Moura) of BOPE. He is burnt out and just wants to retire from BOPE and spend time with his pregnant wife. First, though, he must find and train a successor.

Two rookies have joined the regular police at this time – Neto (Caio Junqueira) who is impulsive but throws himself into any task he is given, and Matias (Andre Ramiro) who is thoughtful, methodical, and believes passionately in the law. He is studying law at University. Their first assignment is the precinct car pool. There are only twelve vehicles for forty police, and keeping them going is a major task. Spare parts can't be afforded, and even a new engine disappears from a car and is replaced with a worn out one, courtesy of a police officer supplementing his pay.

The precinct Commander is as corrupt as any and is making enemies by gradually taking over their protection rackets from his subordinates, so he is no help. Neto gets the idea of stealing the Commander's bribe money that is picked up by an officer each Friday, and then using the money to buy the car parts they need. His plan works but the Commander finds out who has ripped him off. He believes they were acting under the orders of Fabio, their Captain, who has been one of the biggest losers to the Commander's greed. He arranges for Fabio to be executed by a cooperative drug lord.

The two rookies are caught up in the execution gun battle but are rescued in the nick of time by BOPE. They find that here are the honest well-trained cops they want to become, and are chosen to train for the squad. The training is brutal and degrading, designed to weed out the weak and corrupt, but they come through it and at-

tract Captain Nascimento's attention.

As a result of a subplot, Neto is killed by a local drug lord, Balano. If a member of the squad dies, it will be all out war in the favela until the killer is brought to justice or killed. BOPE will stop at nothing to achieve this – murder, torture, terrorism – their methods are well outside the law, but in the war in the favelas, they ARE the law.

Matias must decide whether his love for the law is more important than revenge for his friend's death, or whether BOPE can really make a difference in the only way that counts – killing the enemy. Is BOPE itself out of control, or simply the only way to maintain order when the law has broken down?

The book on which the film is based was written by two ex-BOPE members. The actors were trained by more ex-BOPE people. The actors are locals, not imported stars, and these factors give the film an impressive credibility. If further support for the film's accuracy is needed, an Amnesty International report listed over 1,260 killed by police in Rio de Janeiro state alone. It is not surprising, then, that the film's release was turbulent. Cast and crew were harassed by police and government, court cases were brought against the producer, there was a Parliamentary enquiry, and the pirate copy of the film was seen by millions of people before its official release. In spite of this it became Brazil's biggest-selling DVD.

Wagner Moura's narration is perfect for the role.

He comes across as the overstressed policeman who believes they are at war, but he cannot see that their actions may be as bad as those they are fighting. The photography is not particularly high quality and the hand-held camera work does not help, but it does give the film a rather gritty reality. Much of the action happens at night and this would usually lead to even poorer film, but Padilha has lifted the quality here so night scenes are still easy to follow.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said about the subtitles, which are in yellow superimposed over the film. This is about the only letdown in what is otherwise a superb film.

Tropa De Elite has won First Prize at the Berlin Film Festival, but so far does not seem to have

been widely distributed internationally. Perhaps, like *Mad Max*, it will take a while for audiences to overcome their feelings about the violence and corruption. It may remain a cult movie until then.

And that would be a shame, because it really is a fine film about what happens when the dregs of society come to power. If you want a film that is different and compelling, and will provoke strong emotions in the viewer, try this one. You will love it or hate it, you may condemn the violence, but it won't leave you unmoved.

Green Fish
Third Window films
1997
Gangster drama
Korean with white
on black English
subtitles
R2
16:9 Widescreen

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich



Some issues back we looked at a Korean gangster film, *A Dirty Carnival*. This dealt with the place and problems of ordinary street "soldiers" in the thriving Korean crime gangs. It dealt with themes of loyalty and betrayal. *Green Fish* starts the process a little earlier, but covers the same descent into violence and despair. It is directed by Lee Chang-Dong and produced by Myung Kay-nam and Yeo Gyun-Dong.

Mak-Dong has just been discharged from the army after many years away from home. On his return, he finds that his little hometown village is now on the outskirts of Ilsan, a huge city complex. The happy family that he dreamed of coming home to has its problems.

One brother is retarded, another is a detective with a serious alcohol problem. His sister appears to have become a prostitute. His mother is working as a maid in the city. Jobs are not easy to come by in the new city. With no contacts and feeling alienated, Mak-Dong's idea of starting a small family restaurant seems to be a forlorn hope

Through a contact with a girl he briefly met on the train home he gets a job of sorts as a parking attendant, organized for him by a local crime



lord Bae Tae-Gon. The girl, Mi-Ae, is Tae-Gon's mistress, but that does not stop the two becoming interested in each other. As a result of a brawl in which he acquits himself fairly well, Mak-Dong is promoted to the ranks of Tae-Gon's soldiers, and this is where his descent into violence begins. He consolidates his position when he sets up a local councilor who is resisting one of Tae-Gon's property redevelopments. Although Mak-Dong is not particularly brave or vicious, he seems to fit into the discipline and loyalty required of a street thug. Apart, of course, from his involvement with Mi-Ae, which will get him into serious trouble if he is found out. Although Tae-Gon treats her with contempt, he will not tolerate disloyalty from a subordinate.

Bae Tae-Gon has built his criminal empire while his own boss was in jail. Now his ex-boss is out of prison, and Tae-Gon is reluctant to give up all that he has built up. He has never had to stand up to his ex-boss before, and at their first meeting his ex-boss taunts him about this. There is going to be a gang war over the territory and Mak-Dong is going to be deeply involved in it. He knifes one of the opposition gang, and this could be the turning point. Can his boss stand up to his ex-boss? Will his involvement with Mi-Ae be found out? Can he even help his dysfunctional family? Mak-Dong is now in so deep that there will not be a happy ending.

Green Fish was Lee's first film. The production is a little rough, with long scenes filmed with a hand-held camera. This seems to have become his trademark style, and although it seems a little unprofessional it allows long action sequences to flow without the interruption of camera changes. It adds to the gritty impact of the film and builds up the tension. The film won the Dragons and Tigers Award at the Vancouver Film Festival.

It is a rather morose film, with few moments of happiness to lift the gloom. Partly this is a result of Mak-Dong's alienation, partly it results from the realization that the city and all its associated vice and crime has sprouted in such a short time in what was once a quiet rural community. There are a number of camera shots in which the high rise buildings of the city loom in the background, stark, impersonal, and out of place. If this is the future of Korea, there will be many more Mak-Dongs.

The Kaiser's Lackey R1 DVD First Run Pictures

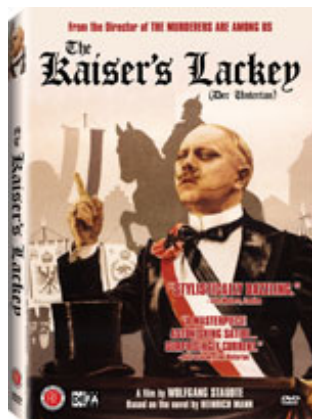
Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Black and White, subtitled

This satirical but menacing film was produced in East Germany by DEFA, (Deutsche Filmaktiengesellschaft), the rather irreverent east German film company in the Communist era. The characters are caricatures and the film was theoretically a comedy. It is the story of Deiderich Hessling, raised in the turn-of-the-century period by overbearing parents, ultra-nationalistic schoolteachers, and rigid authoritarian social structures. Young Hessling soon learns that the best way to get on in life is to become the lackey of those in power. This attitude continues through his days at University, where he even gives up the girl he is falling in love with when threatened by an older student.

He starts to show some independence and backbone when he is sucked into a semi-militaristic Corps, the neo-Teutons, whose specialty seems to be drinking and duelling. While a member he receives a scar in a stylized duel which makes him a little more socially acceptable, as it apparently is a sign of bravery. He is unsuccessful when he joins the Army, however. He is discharged when it is found he has flat feet.

When Hessling's father dies and he inherits the family business, his true nature blossoms. He becomes a pompous, loudmouthed, overbearing pig of a man who professes his undying loyalty to Germany and "his" Kaiser (provided he is



not called on to make any real sacrifice). He promotes the Kaiser as the new God of Germany. He is unconcerned that Church attendances are falling, "urgent business matters" as his excuse. He cheats, lies, swindles and backstabs his friends to rise in power. He is a constant urger of loyalty to his Fuehrer (sorry, Kaiser) and his public vocal support helps him rise in social standing in his town. Eventually it all comes crashing down. Money he has swindled is used to build a huge statue of the Kaiser in the town square, and at the unveiling a huge storm hits and destroys much of the town. Perhaps the hand of God has carried out vengeance for Hessling's sycophantic replacement of God with the Kaiser.

The film is a savage satire, and Staudte brings out the ridiculous, destructive nature of unquestioning jingoism. The parallel to Hitler's rise to power is unmistakable, and the final scene of the destruction in the town square is also unmistakable as World War 2 damage. Little wonder, then, that the film made Germans uncomfortable when Germany was reunited.

The film was banned for many years. It has only recently been re-released (and, by the look of it, beautifully restored) since the University of Massachusetts got hold of the DEFA film library. Their contract with Icestorm Entertainment and FirstRun Features is seeing the collection cleaned up, subtitled, and released on DVD.

Although the film is not particularly great for its acting or plot, its place in Germany's film history is significant. The satire does not only apply to Germany, either. This is what makes the film a classic.

Turtles are Surprisingly Fast Swimmers **Third Windows Films**

Web: <http://www.thirdwindowfilms.com>
R2 DVD

Comedy
Japanese with clear English subtitles

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Turtles are Surprisingly Fast Swimmers aka **Turtles Swim Faster Than Expected** is a delightful little low-key comedy from writer/director Satoshi Miki. His slightly warped view of the world means that his characters are.... well, different.

Satoshi Miki was born on August 9, 1961, in Japan. His skills as a writer and director first became noticed with his work on Japanese variety TV shows and stage plays. His first films "**In the Pool**" (2005) and "**Turtles and Surprisingly Fast Swimmers**" (2005) were released in the same year to quite some acclaim. Miki has gained a quite a reputation for his quirky and bizarre sense of humour. His films are marked by the use of strange plots, seemingly complicated scenes and unusual dialogue which is woven together to create a story which shows a very different view of the world.

Suzumi (well played by Juri Ueno) is a bored young housewife. While her husband is away on extended business trips, she lives an ordinary and rather lonely life with just her husband's pet turtle for company.

Her husband's occasional phone calls show more concern for his turtle. Life is so boring and ordinary that she fantasizes that she is becoming invisible. Her best (and only) friend by contrast leads an exciting, active, and slightly deranged life. Suzumi wishes she could have some of her friend's outgoing nature, but her

only attempt at breaking out of her boredom is a new hairstyle.

One day she sees a tiny advertisement inviting her to "become a spy". Intrigued, she rings the phone number and a few days later she is accepted as a sleeper agent – because of her sheer ordinairiness, no one would suspect her of being a spy. She is actually put through a series of tests to prove that she is suitably ordinary.

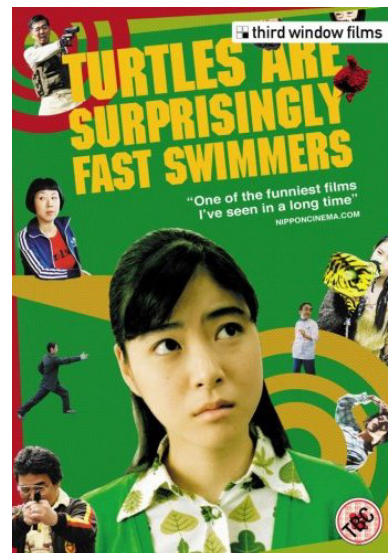
Nobody explains who they are spying for, or what they are spying on. They wait around, being totally ordinary, until the big day when they will be activated. She meets other spies, and gradually starts to form friendships with them. Her dull life is actually becoming a little more interesting.

It becomes even more interesting when the Japanese authorities become interested in her town, investigating rumours that there is a spy ring operating there. In the final hunt for the spies, only Suzumi can save her friends, but she spoils her ordinary image by doing something heroic and getting noticed.

Satoshi constructs his characters to appear ordinary on the outside, but as we get to know them better we find all sorts of quirks hidden underneath, like the noodle cook spy who can make great noodles but just makes "so-so" noodles so he will appear ordinary. You are what you want to be.

It is this problem of people trying to be something they are not that carries the comedy of the film, rather than a laugh-a-minute plot. The ending is a little flat, but the rest of the film makes up for it. It is a gentle little film, with excellent cinematography and great acting. Give it a try.

Turtles are Surprisingly Fast Swimmers is presented in 1:85:1 anamorphic widescreen.



MAGAZINES & COMICS IN REVIEW



Asian Cult Cinema Issue 81 First Quarter 2009

Asian Cult Cinema is a superb, full colour guide to Asian cult cinema. It covers the whole gambit from Japanese horror to Hong Kong extreme and action films, Chinese spectacular to Korean releases. It has a range of regular columns by well informed writers who work in the fields of films, film criticism and related activities.

In this issue there is a special feature on the films of Yuki Mishima. This is an especially interesting piece as while many know Mishima as a well respected but eccentric Japanese author, they do not know of his film career. In the West, his life and death was celebrated in **"Mishima: a Life of four Chapters"** and many were introduced to him via this film. An unusual individual dedicated to the Emperor with fascistic leanings, married and yet a homosexual with S & M proclivities, a man who died by Harikiri after taking an army base captive, Mishima is a fascinating subject. His film career is just as intriguing from gangster films to patriotic epics.

There is also an excellent focus on John Woo, including a comprehensive review of his masterpiece **Red Cliff** and interviews with both John and Anne Woo.

There are lots of shorter reviews as well as more extensive coverage of such films as **Love Exposure** and **Cruel Restaurant**.



There is also an interesting piece on Harikiri porn on film.

The current issue is 62 pages in length, full colour with Eri Otoguro as Chambara Beauty on the back.

Web: <http://www.asiancult.com>

Electric Sheep Spring 09 Wallflower Press

Once again Electric Sheep delights us with its offbeat approach to cinema. Each issue explores a different theme taken from the underbelly of film. From horror to cult, World Cinema to indie.

Tainted Love: Doomed passions, secret obsessions and falling for the wrong person – the dark side of cinematic love.

The spring issue of Electric Sheep focuses on Tainted Love to celebrate the release of the sweet and bloody pre-teen vampire romance **"Let the Right One In"**. Once again it is packed with insightful and challenging articles including articles on incestuous cinematic siblings, François Ozon's tales of tortuous relationships, destructive passion in Nic Roeg's **Bad Timing**, Julio Medem's ambiguous lovers and nihilistic tenderness from Kôji Wakamatsu.

It also includes an Interview with John Lindqvist, an examination of Film in Berlin from squat cinema to the Berlinale, an article on The Polish New Wave and a very cool Comic strip on the Watchmen film adaptation.

Web: <http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk>



Mineshaft

Issue No.23

Another fantastic issue from Mineshaft offering a Shish-ka-bob of Literary Hipness.

The cover by Jay Lynch is absolutely incredibly and the back is by Robert Crumb and colored by Jay Lynch!!

It also features Grob Schwank by Ed Piskor & Sarah Sveda, a sneak peak at the latest Zippy book (Welcome to Dingburg), ! "Letters to Sexology Magazine" by Bruce Simon! Frank Stack's "Dirty Diana"! Sophie Crumb! Pat Moriarity! Bill Griffith! Harvey Pekar and Tara Seibel! This issue is packed with fun "underground type comics" with lots of adult content and all manner of weirdness and even a Crumb centre section !



Web: <http://www.mineshaftmagazine.com/>

The Undersea Adventures of Capt'n Eli Volume 2

The Mystery of the Sargasso Sea

Web: <http://www.captneli.com>

Once more we are treated to some superb adventure. Developed from the ever creative psyche of Jay Piscopo comes the epic Undersea Adventures of Capt'n Eli, a graphic novel series in the tradition of Jules Verne, Herge, and classic comic strips with glimpses of Buck Rogers and boy's own annuals !

With his companions Jolly Roger, a 200-year-old parrot, and the faithful seadog Barney, Capt'n Eli takes readers into a mesmerizing world of time travel, high-tech ships, flying mini-sub, robots, lost civilizations, and undersea empires in conflict.

This new graphic novel series features Jay's highly unique signature style -- integrating timeless 2D character artwork with stunning, modern 3D backgrounds to tell this expansive, engrossing story.

The look of these graphic novels is quite unique and blends together various artistic styles with a superb adventure tale.

It will resonate with those of us who miss the great age of comics and will also bring in many new fans looking for a different type of comic than those commonly found on the market today. It is also great to see a graphic novel which will appeal to all ages.

Volume 2 of The Undersea Adventures of Capt'n Eli explodes with action as the mysterious Commander X introduces Capt'n Eli to a world of vast undersea empires. Following on from Volume One Capt'n Eli is with Commander X aboard his super high tech submarine "Sub Zero." They reach the underwater city of Aquaria to find it under attack by a race of underwater denizens known as the Outcast.

We learn that Aquaria and its people are now ruled by Commander X's former World War II partner, known as The Sea Raider and that Commander X has vowed to protect them. Along the way we also find out how Aquaria is related to Atlantis, the history of Aquaria and the secret of its leader.

This is heady stuff, filled with adventure and action !

This issue is a tribute to the Silver Age of comics and features pin-ups by legendary comics artist Herb Trimpe, Joe Zierman of Big Bang Comics, and artist and animator Lauren Monardo. Cover by Joe Zierman.

It is 112 pages and in full color.

See website for Volume 1 and related action figure !!



COUNTDOWN

Cult Music Success Story!

Countdown was a pop and rock music program created by Michael Shrimpton, Rob Weekes and Ian "Molly" Meldrum. It first aired on the ABC on 8th November 1974 and was initially a half hour program shown on Saturday night hosted by various D.J's, the first being Grant Goldman. By January 1975, after an initial good response, Countdown was shifted to a prime time slot of 6pm Sunday and extended to a full hour. Countdown was initially hosted by guest presenters with John Farnham hosting the first program in the premium time slot which also featured the outrageous new Australian band Skyhooks.

Ian "Molly" Meldrum was the talent manager for the show and using his contacts throughout the music world and friendships with many of the world's best artists was able to bring an international feel to Countdown. Considering Countdown was an Australian music program on a government funded TV station it was really quite an achievement. Interviews with everyone from Madonna to Elton John, Rod Stewart to ABBA created an instant international reputation. Countdown became a doorway to the Australian market. ABBA received their first worldwide exposure on Countdown as did The Human League and Pseudo Echo as well as many, many others.

At the same time Molly was also committed to Australian music. From the very beginning Countdown showcased artists like Skyhooks, Marcia Hines, Sherbet, AC/DC and John Paul Young. Molly also took the risk with many new and unknown artists, many of these went onto greater things, others became "one hit wonders" and this is what gave Countdown such an appeal. Countdown was also noted for its mixture of big name artists, Australian content and new, and at times, eccentric and bizarre performers.

Molly was also known for his all too human approach to interviews, bumbling, giggling and on many occasions having trouble just through his questions. This endeared him to most, infuriated



a few and shocked others. Who can forget the amazing Prince Charles interview when lost for words he asked how "his mother was" or the Iggy Pop interview when he could hardly contain the clearly drug addled Iggy. His many interview stuff ups have become truly legend in the music interview. Molly's Humdrum department where he reviewed new albums made famous his phrase "do yourself a favour" as he discussed the latest batch of albums and singles and that is not to mention his hat !

At the same time it was not just Molly, there was Gavin Wood, working away as a presenter and researcher and behind the scenes a whole Countdown research team who used their knowledge of the worldwide music industry to make Countdown the byword in TV music entertainment. For its time it was unique.

Countdown really became a "cult" phenomenon; it was so much more than a music show, combining everything from quirky interviews, great music, fashion, the earliest film clips to featuring live bands and artists. It moved into other media with the release of Countdown Annuals, which were published from the later Seventies to its demise. There was also the Countdown Magazine which began as the "Countdown Club" magazine in 1982 and moved into a full colour magazine in 1984, closing in 1987.



John Paul Young—regular Countdown artist.

Countdown entered the world of urban legend after its closure, becoming part of Australia's cultural history. Molly Meldrum became the by-word for rock 'n roll taste and while other music shows took its place these tend to be selections of film-clips and lack the personality and style of the Countdown experience.

Reruns on ABC's late night music show Rage became popular and in 2006/2007 a live show was created to celebrate the musicians of Countdown. It took five years to organize and took 156 people - 88 performers and 68 crew – to bring it to the stage – a massive undertaking.

Countdown Spectacular 1 and 2 both were incredible success stories, Countdown Spectacular One was so successful that in the 2007 tour international artists such as Rick Springfield, Martha Davis of The Motels, Doug Fieger Of The Knack, Katrina Leskanich formerly of Katrina & The Waves, Plastic Bertrand, Les McKeown formerly of The Bay City Rollers, Richard Gower of Racey, David Paton of Pilot, Robin Scott alias 'M', Samantha Fox and Graham Bonnet were added into the mix.

The live shows are an eccentric mix which proves just as exciting on DVD and CD release as if you were attending the show. **The Countdown Spectacular Live DVD set (2 discs)** from Liberation Music offers the first show on DVD.

The artists range from bands and performers



who have clearly keep working through the years and belt out their numbers with confidence and style, James Reyne, Sherbert and the Choir Boys come to mind.

There are some amazing performances from older bands such as Hush and artists such as Jon English and Rene Geyer. There are also some one hit wonders who really should have starred on "Where are they now", the wild woman of Cheeta should clearly have been put out to pasture and I did not think Wendy Stapleton did a lot better, but that

may be being a little uncharitable, but what the hell !

Frankie J Holden and Wilbur Wilde of Ole '55 were great fun as was the frenetic and rather outrageous Brian Mannix of Uncanny X-men.

The CD edition of the second show is packed with both international and location content.

It is a 3 Disc CD set included 2 live discs and a further CD of the original songs.

With a balance between Countdown's international and local appeal it includes such crowd pleasers as Rick Springfield, Doug Fieger Kate Ceberano, Samantha Fox, Richard Clapton and many others.

This edition gives many of them two or three songs each which really takes more advantage of their talent and offers the listener a chance to enjoy each artist a lot more than in the first show which tended to have a wider variety but only one song from each (with a few exceptions).

After the Live shows you may want to go back to the originals and Liberation Records have released a superb range of DVDs and CDs exploring the original Countdown experience.

The Wonder Years offer original live performances from the biggest artists of the Seventies and Eighties as featured on Countdown.





Molly and Bob Hawke “chewing the fat” on Countdown.

Countdown – The Wonder Years 2 is a superb 2 DVD set which features 70 explosive hits from the Countdown era, including Elton John, Spandau Ballet, Duran Duran, Kiss, Billy Idol, Split Enz, B52’s and more. It is nicely presented and songs can be played sequentially or accessed via menu.



These are the songs which made the Seventies and Eighties from the sublime to the ridiculous, from outstretched ballads to pop, it is all there.

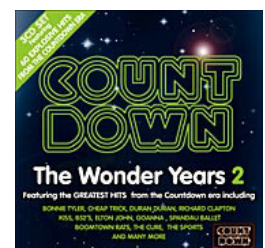
The Wonder Year CDs are superb 3 CD collections.

Countdown The Wonder Years includes some 61 hits opening with the quintessential Horror Movie by Skyhooks and offering everything from Mi Sex to Hush, Ted Mulry Gang to Sherbet, Mondo Rock to Icehouse and some silly tracks such as Shaddup Your Face by Joe Dolce.



It is a superb collection and has appeal both as a nostalgic set and for those just discovering the long lost treasures Countdown still has to offer.

Countdown The Wonder Years 2 offers another 3 CDs of amazing content, this time including 70 massive songs from the Seventies and Eighties. Opening again, this time with Ego Is Not



a Dirty Word by Skyhooks and then offering us everything from Hot Chocolate, Bay City Rollers and The Vapors to Devo, Toni Basil and Bananarama.

After enjoying these selections, you may wish to move to the more eccentric and unusual in “One Hit Wonders”. This is a 2 CD and 1 DVD set including a great collection of songs which made it to the public consciousness and up the charts but after that the artists never really made it in Australia again.



It includes some truly awesome and some truly bizarre songs. From the Hooters All you Zombies clip with its deep and meaningful lyrics to Gloria with Laura Branigan wearing the tightest outfit ever seen. There is Haysi Fantayzee with Shiny Shiny and Boy George Clone Marilyn with You Don't Love Me Anymore. This a selection of songs many of which you will be thrilled to hear again, some of which you hoped you would never hear again.

These are a small selection of the Liberation Record titles, there are various other releases and are sure to be more.

Countdown has become a true “cult” music phenomenon, from what began as a ABC pop music show on the Australian national broadcaster it created a generation of music lovers and introduced Australians to a world of new music as well as musicians from around the world to the Australian market. It became the show to be seen on and opened up a new world to Australian youth wishing to explore new sounds.

It spawned numerous other music shows as well as live shows, DVDs, CDs and made Molly Meldrum a household name.

As years pass its reputation seems to increase to a nearly mythic level and with the range of content produced during its 13 years of weekly programs, there is a lot more gold to found in this mine yet !

MUSIC & COMEDY IN REVIEW



Junior Röyksopp Emi 2009

Röyksopp offers electronic chillout music and hit the ground running some eight years with Melody AM which was followed by Understanding. Röyksopp has certainly been working hard as Junior will be followed by a further recording, Senior, in a short time.



Junior combines the witty, fun and catchiness of the melodies they are noted for with all manner of synth led music bringing together electronic, funky, dance and more.

While they have written, performed, arranged, mixed and produced the album it also features guest vocals from the likes of Lykke Li, Robyn and Karin Dreijer-Andersson (of The Knife).

The album opens with Happy Up Here which is a very catchy little dance number, it is funky, fun and even a bit trippy.

The next track is The Girl And The Robot featuring the voice of Robyn, it is a top notch dance disco track, it is a superb Diva number which will have the feet moving !

Long-time Röyksopp collaborator, Anneli Drecker, is next in a superb track which forges her falsetto onto a strangely warped yet resonant electronic loop which develops into a great piece of electronica.

This Must Be It and Miss It So Much continue the synth dance sound with great vocals. There are clearly a lot of hits on this album.

Röyksopp Forever is a rather cool change of place, offering a relaxed chilled sound which gives us a nice breathing space between the dance numbers !

The album continues meandering through electro and dance offering all sorts of interesting riffs and explorations, there are lots of hooks here which will stick in your mind a long time after you play it.

Brundtland and Berge really know their stuff; they create music that sounds so easy, so laid back and yet is really so textured and complex. It is very difficult to make music that sounds smooth and simple yet underneath is complex and well crafted. They have succeeded admirably and this is only the first of two albums this year.

Love is Struggling Naommon CD Baby 2009

Naommon's world is one of an underground, dark and gritty disco yet with a sense of style and camp. Redefining modern dance music and bringing his own elements of Euro-dance to the clubs worldwide, Naommon's brand new album "Love Is Struggling" is a classic exposition on what it means to "scratch the glitter." This album is a neo-discopop collection of songs that will make heads turn and certainly increase his already solid reputation.



Last year treated Naommon very well. His debut album "**Allnighter**" was critically praised and his music videos for singles "Allnighter" and "You Go To My Head" made a huge splash on LOGO, HBO Zone, Promo Only, Rock America, Screenplay and more. Naommon's fans also voted him in as the #1 Artist on The Click List, which is the Top 10 Video Countdown show on MTV Gay Network the Logo Channel.

A child of the Eighties, teen of the Nineties, clubber of the 2000s, Naommon embodies - both musically and physically a myriad of continually morphing influences from the

spaceglam of Bowie, sophistication of Daft Punk, acidfunk of Deee-Lite and Dietrich's rigorous sense of glamour, to London's creative parties Paris's romantic dandyism and high camp of New York's pop scene. This only begins to describe Naommon's presence and live stage shows.

It was Naommon's appearance on the French talent TV show, "Popstars" that sparked collaborations with hot electro producers Kiko resulting in several hot singles on International DeeJay Gigolo Records including the European club classic "Jack The Box (Come On Up And See Me Sometimes)".

Web: <http://www.naommon.com>

Missing in Action 1 & 2 Soundtracks Intrada

Missing in Action 1

The 1984 action film **Missing in Action** features the first in a trilogy of Chuck Norris/Viet Nam adventures, which proved to be one of Cannon Group's most popular series.



Norris plays the fictional Colonel James Braddock, an escaped prisoner of war who returns to Vietnam as part of an American delegation charged with investigating the fate of those soldiers who went "missing in action" during the war.

Faced with stonewalling and treachery, Braddock determines to take matters into his own hands. With few allies, and pursued by deadly enemies, he tackles any obstacle to his mission: thugs, assassins, gunboats, a contingent of prison camp guards—even an entire military convoy.

Braddock's determination and heroics are musically accompanied by the strong action and suspense score by Jay Chattaway (**Invasion USA**). Much of the film is occupied with stealth and suspense, which Chattaway facilitates with tense synth clusters. At the heart of both film and score, however, is action, action and more action. Braddock's bloody campaign is bolstered by a main theme as tough and direct as

Norris's unwavering gaze: an ostinato-anchored militaristic line based around a series of rising fifths, performed variously by synth and orchestra. The theme appears most frequently in minor modes, but occasionally transforms itself with a heroic major cast, as with Braddock's arrival at Vietnam's jungle coast.

Additional layers of harmony come into play during the theme's expressive B-section, ensuring that Norris's humanity and the essential goodness of the mission don't get lost in the mix. Everything builds to the score's climax, a tour de force of powerful horn writing and jagged low strings for the convoy attack and final chase. The end result is a rhythmic, multi-tonal suite of film music that truly complements the story.

After the 1984 recording sessions ended, the multi-track masters were mixed down to a single channel in post-production for the mono film presentation and then the stereo elements themselves went MIA. This release features the complete score in excellent mono sound from the original session tapes at MGM.

Missing in Action 2

While Missing in Action 2 was scored by Brian May. Intrada offers the world premiere release of complete score for 2nd chapter of popular action movie franchise starring Chuck Norris. (Film was shot and intended to play as first in series but wound up as second.)



Brian May anchors rousing score with heroic major-key motif for wartime heroics but gives ample attention to descending minor-key idea for POW storyline as well. Dynamic contrast between two themes gives music degree of scope. Profuse action material also gets spotlight throughout. When all is said and done, May wraps with dynamite finish to score! Just over half of score saw release on Edel label. Intrada proudly expands CD by half hour, offers vibrant, unusually detailed stereo audio direct from multi-track session masters. (Yes, MIA 1 & 3 will be forthcoming! Collect 'em all!) Brian May conducts.

Intrada

Web: <http://store.intrada.com/>

**Room Service Deluxe
2 CD
Compilation
Liberation Music
2009**

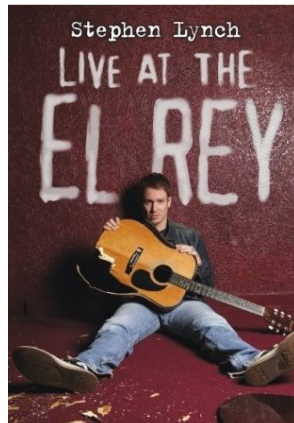


Billed as the Ultimate Soundtrack for the Seriously Hip. This is one very cool album; two CDs packed with tracks which will make your cocktail party seem far more hip than it really is. There is a great selection ranging from movie soundtracks such as The Avengers and From Russia with Love to quirky beauties as Light My Life by Jose Feliciano. There are lots of classic titles from everyone from Tom Jones to Aretha Franklin, Dean Martin to Mamma Cass, the Seekers to Don McLean. There is Cabaret, Lounge, Jazz, Classic Folk and even some country. It is so much fun to see how things that go around come around, songs that would have been seriously uncool in the Seventies and Eighties are now the height of style !

This is album which takes you where you want to go You will find yourself playing it more and more. It is trendy, cool and oh so hip !

**Stephen Lynch
Live at the El Rey
Beyond Home
Entertainment**

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich



Stephen Lynch is one of the most politically incorrect singer / comedians I have yet seen. No subject is sacred to him in his sixteen brief but brilliant songs. In this DVD he sings about ugly babies, priests and altar boys, gay people, his dying grandfather, retarded kids, and just about any other taboo subject you can think of.

He rarely strays into tastelessness, though – it's simply funny, and you would only find the songs offensive if you were really determined to do so.

The songs are often biting satirical, and feature unexpected twists in the lyrics and punch lines. Unfortunately I can't give you examples as it will spoil the effect when you watch the

DVD – the unexpected slant of his songs is a major feature, and indeed the main part of his comedy. Stephen has a very mobile face which enhances his delivery in the frequent close-ups. He plays well to the crowd and invites their participation. His delivery seems to be a little rough and ready and not as slick as other comedians. This just makes his act more endearing for looking more spontaneous.

The overall feel of the show is friends together to enjoy a good laugh with him, and you finish the show feeling you have shared it with him rather than just watched a performance..

The way he can play games with the English language is more akin to subtle British humour, and his punch lines sort of sneak up on you. The song format of his act lets him go past the brief sarcastic one-liner so typical of U.S. comedy. The only unfortunate side to his act is his tendency to overuse the F*** word. It detracts a little from what is otherwise a great show.

The DVD has bonus features including extra songs, commentary, a video diary of the tour, and historical material like studio footage.

It's a good package and a good laugh.

**Soul Deep
BBC
Liberation Music
2009**



Soul Deep was a highly successful BBC six part series which charted the rise of Black popular music.

It received rave reviews and covered all aspects of Black music from its early origins to modern forms with an emphasis on Soul Music.

This two disc CD set has been released in conjunction with the BBC television series, which is a comprehensive six part series on the history of Black music.

It features thirty nine classics covering the gambit of popular Black music with a special focus on the primetime of Soul Music, the Sixties.

It is a marvelous compilation for anyone who either has not experienced the beauty of Soul

Music before or who would like to have a solid compilation in one place.

The selection has been made exceptionally well, offering a good balance of significant tracks from the two major studios Motown and Stax and including songs which may would considered to be the byword for Soul Music including James Brown's "Cold Sweat," James Carr's "At the Dark End of the Street," Fontella Bass' "Rescue Me," and let's not forget The Supremes "Baby Love" !

It includes extensive sleeve notes by soul historian Barney Hoskyns and offers a nice balance to the present obsession of Black music with hip hop and rap.



**Tennant and Lowe: Pet Shop Boys.
Their latest album "Yes" proves they still
have what it takes.**

**Yes
Pet Shop Boys
Parlophone
EMI 2009**

Yes, Pet Shop Boys.



Yes is the tenth studio from the Pet Shop Boys. They are considered one of the most iconic and influential pop acts in the world. In a career spanning over two decades, the duo of Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe have created some of the most beloved and recognizable hits in the world (West End girls, It's a sin, New York City Boy, etc.) and Yes continues the success story.

The first time I listened to Yes I thought it sounded a bit too much like so many of the Pet Shop Boys other albums and didn't offer enough that was new. But as I listened to it over the next week, it slowly got under my skin and I realized how much it has to offer. On one hand the Pet Shop Boys have returned to their roots and yet done so in a new and very creative way.

While I liked the strong political stance of Fundamental, Yes goes back to the lush mood of Very and really offers some quite impressive tracks. Tennant and Lowe hooked up with Xenomania, the leading pop song writing production house in the UK and what has resulted is really quite fabulous and its gets better each time you listen to it.

'All Over The World' is a pretty cool way to open an album, combining a strong dance sound with samples of Tchaikovsky. Such a mixture of low brow and high culture—quintessential Pet Shop Boys !

At the same time is not all pop, there are some reflective ballads such as "King Of Rome" and "Legacy" which are certainly resonant of Behavior and some of their best efforts from over the years.

I certainly enjoy the diversity of styles on one album, from ballads to the upbeat riot of Pandemonium to the campy Did You See Me Coming and the insightful Building a Wall.

This is another success story from Tennant and Lowe that shows they have a more in store for us yet.

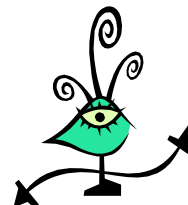
Yes is certainly worth getting hold of. It offers a return to the earlier Pet Shop Boy sound with some nice new textures and refinements.

In a word, it is a very cool album.

The single from Yes is "Love etc" which the Pet Shop Boys describe the song as "a post-lifestyle anthem which sounds like nothing we've done before."

See the video here:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InBiaRBUjUs>

TOYS & COLLECTIBLES



Crazy Label

Crazy Label produce a wide range of unusual, startling and funny collectibles. They are beautifully made with a high level of attention to detail and a great sense of play. While there are many in production, we will cover just a few here, from the cute Droplets to the engaging Marty the Mole and not to forget The Monster Burp !



Droplets

The Droplet was born from the glassy walls of the JamFactory. Droplet spent his infant years pushing pixels and licking kittens until he decided to join the mystical Crazy Label family, where he tamed his inner beast and gained the strength needed to become the world's slickest plaything.

The Droplet's are 2.5" and seriously cute. They have such a presence !

The Droplets are "Rhubarb & Custard", "Refresher", "Campino" and "Apple", plus the secret chase "Vimto" – each in a different colour. Collect 'em all.

Marty the Mole

Metin Seven is a designer whose webcomic Seamour Sheep has garnered interest due to its comical story line and hilarious main characters.



The comic follows the adventures of a Scottish sheep named Seamour and a wiseacre mole named Marty. Now you can meet both of these characters as vinyl toys !

Marty Mole is made of rotocast vinyl, stands in at around 3.25" tall and has two points of articulation (ball joint shoulders). He is a superb character and looks incredibly realistic, he is fun, adorable and charming!

Monster Burp

Monster Burp is a strange and quirky vinyl figure based on UK designer Peskimo's print contribution to the Monster Burp show of 2007. It is a startling collectible 6" from top to bottom, beautifully made and presented in a nice presentation box with a colour brochure.



It is like a cartoon frozen in time, it has a small monster creating a very, very huge burp ! It looks so active, so lifelike – put it on display and it will be the centre of attention !

Web: <http://www.crazylabel.com>

Doolie Boxes & Fresh Fruit

Doolie Boxes & Fresh Fruit

Anna Chambers

Web: <http://www.annachambers.com>

Doolie Boxes

The Doolie Boxes are playful plush blocks which are stackable, hugable and rather fun.

They are made of soft fleece and terry cloth and the included hang tag can double as a coaster. The plush measures 9" wide, 7" tall, and 4" thick.

TooBaa Doolie is the first character released from Anna Chambers' Doolie Box gang and is purple in colour, he is seriously cute. He can be stacked with his mate Tee Hee Doolie who is blue.

Each Doolie has funny little arms and legs as well as ears. They have very lovable faces and bright cheeks.

The Doolie Boxes are limited to 500 pieces, each one is individually bagged. They are very nicely made and rather unique plushes.

Fresh Fruit

The Fresh Fruit line is made up of four different apples, with differing personalities and colours. There are two red apples and two green apples, and there's a happy and sad version of



each color. The apples are such a simple concept, yet look so cool. They are very well made and mimic the look of a real apple exceptionally well.

Each apple plush is approximately 6.5" tall (to top of leaf) and 4.5" round and has a stem and a single leaf, as well as a pair of black eyes. The red apples are softer to the touch while the green seen more fleecy.

Each plush apple comes packaged in its own clear plastic shell – you want to keep your fruit



fresh!. Each case has a sticker on the top with the Fresh Fruit title, the name of the fruit (such as Tart and Tangy Red or Crisp and Delicious Green) and a drawing of the enclosed apple.

Anna Chambers really knows what people like in plush toys, she works as a background painter in television animation and it shows.

The Doolie Boxes look like something what has walked straight out of a cartoon into your lounge room. These are great items, reasonably priced and yet sustaining high quality production values.

FluffyYuk Yuks

The FluffyFriends: Chompin Plus Toys

Web: <http://www.thefluffyfriends.com/>

In a land so very far away and so very long ago, there lived a cute but diabolical civilization of fluffy creatures that simply love to chomp stuff!

For many years, all the FluffyFriends lived harmoniously together, sharing their lives of fluffiness and happily chompin' to their hearts content.

The Fluffy's began to notice something really strange happening to their beloved fluffy world. All the wonderful things they loved to chomp on all started to disappear. At first, the Fluffy's were not alarmed, and kept on living on their normal chompy chomp diet. However, it wasn't long before almost every single chomp-able object had vanished!

The FluffyFriends had a meeting, and decided that it wouldn't be long before their civilization came to end. With haste, the Fluffy's decided to send their bravest on a journey in search of a new world which would have more things to chomp on!

After a long and perilous journey, the FluffyFriends found their way to earth. Ever since, the Fluffy's have been in pure chompin' ecstasy!

With so many snazzy things to chomp on here, they sent word back home to their friends to

come and check it out!

So, they come to earth every so often and continue to make as many human friends as possible so they can use their powers of cuteness to persuade us to give them cool things to chomp on!

When new FluffyFriends arrive, it is our duty as humans to make friends with them, and keep them happily chompin' forever. Simply put, love your FluffyFriend, because Fluffy loves (to chomp) You!

The FluffyYuk Yuks are very plush and cute. When you pick one up you will notice two finger holes in its back, put your fingers and you can make your Fluffy start chompin'! Your lovely fluffy toy can quickly turn his smile to a snarl. Make your own growling noises and you have a real little winner !

The FluffyYuk Yuks are well made, approximately 5½" tall by 8" wide and very cuddly with hard plastic teeth which chomp ! They actually have a rather hard bite so other plus toys better look out.

They have cute little pink bean bag bottoms which sit nicely on a display shelf. They have six legs and look a bit like an octopus—they are really quite strange and unique and are rather fun.

Each one comes with a tag giving details on how to look after them including advice not to be taken too seriously. Each one is signed and comes with some nice other goodies.

The FluffyYuk Yuk is a really cool chompin' toy and is a fun little collectible.



Hazmate and Cloud-X

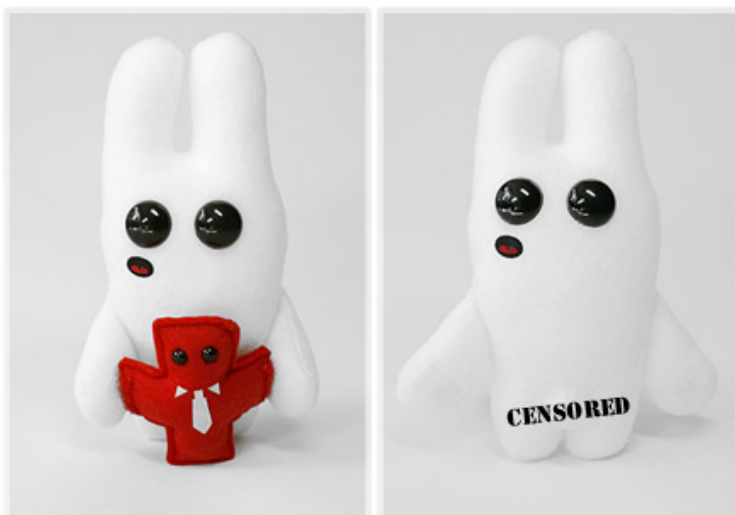


Hazmate and Cloud-X are characters patterned after two Hazchem creatures which Dennis Douven first created as street art stickers. The expression on their faces together with the red X-sign of "extreme danger" induces immediate feelings of confusion and curiosity! Like a strange bitter pill that looks like an attractive sweet candy.

These are really cute items with a real sense of strangeness about them. They combine the immediacy of street art and striking iconography with soft feel of small plush toys.

Hazchem mini-plush are 5 cm (2 inch) big and available in two different designs: Hazmate and Cloud-X. Each design comes with a magnet or phonestrap accessory.

Nuddy:The Naked Rabbit



There are also a nice range of unusual stickers and badges available, a particularly good offering is the Hazchem sticker pack which is a set of 15 random stickers and one pin badge.



Nuddy:The Naked Rabbit

Dennis also creates all manner of other plush collectibles which are beautifully made, eccentric and appealing. For example, Nuddy: The Naked Rabbit is an especially endearing character.

He likes to walk around in his Nuddy-pants. Sometimes when he feels busted 'Hazmate' (the red warning sign) is there for him to cover his naughtiness. Nuddy is a 18 cm (7 inch) handmade plush designer toy, it is a duo of the Nuddy Rabbit and the Hazmate naughtiness cover and is able to stand on its own. Nuddy is a very limited release.

Another cute item is his pink "I Love Computers" plush which was Dennis' submission to the Plushform custom show, set up by Shawnimals in Chicago.

The Bytedust website includes all sorts of interesting news about Dennis' latest products which include many unique customer designer toys which he produces for various shows.

His store also offers some rather nice T-Shirts and Hoodies all exploring his unusual Hazchem street art theme.

Dennis Douven
Bytedust Plus Collectibles
Web: <http://www.bytedust.net>

Jesus Dress Up



There is a lovely old Zen Buddhist proverb which goes "If you see Buddha on the road, Kill Him !" It certainly sounds unusual for a Buddhist to be advocating killing the Buddha and yet it hides a simple truth – idols are for breaking, sacred cows are for slaughtering.

Blasphemy can be an art form which it ridicules things that are held sacred and makes us think as well as entertaining us along the way. Normal Bob Smith has created some truly amazing products and a very impressive website.

At the Normal Bob Smith Website you can explore all manner of strangeness including some

Normal Bob Smith



great free games including Jesus Dress Up, Jesus Darts, Nun Treasure Hunt and more. There are also comics, news and some fun fan and hate mail.

(<http://www.normalbobsmith.com>)

The most exciting and outrageous thing Normal Bob has released is the Jesus Dress Up range (<http://www.jesUSDressup.com>), these are seriously cool.

You can play with them online, dressing Jesus in all manner of outfits from Satanic and Goth to BDSM, KKK to Hitler, Gacy's Clown gear to Marilyn Manson. When you want to go a step further (and c'mon who doesn't ?), you can buy them as fridge magnets. Yep, offend all your Christian friends with these buggers. Hell, next time the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses come to visit, invite them in for a drink and make sure they see your fridge !!

There are now six sets in the range – the original, Final Justice, Superstar, Christmas and BDSM. Of course these have brought out all the fundie puritan nutters such as the American Family Association and even the news channels in the United States have been reporting on them, so they are definitely causing a stir !

They are skilfully made and are very high quality, each has a wonderfully perverse sense of humour and your fridge can change its look six times a year !

They are 11" x 8" in size and include a Jesus on a cross in his undies whom you can dress with all the supplied magnet accessories !

Let's look at a few of them, the original Jesus Dress up has an emphasis on fun and includes everything from leather to a Satan outfit, a ballerina skirt to a hula hula skirt, rabbit slippers to a snorkel, it is actually quite cute.



11" x 8.5"

The Halloween Jesus Dress up is another item which is rather fun.

You can dress the King of Kings as an ape, wizard, skeleton, prisoner, pirate (with his own parrot) or playboy bunny. You can even give him all sorts of strange headgear from Viking horns, an arrow through the head or a Groucho Marx eyes and mo to a multicoloured fro !

Final Justice is definitely more hardcore. You can crucify all manner of enemies by dressing Jesus to look like them. Crucifixion for your enemies or blasphemy, who cares !

The outfits are very wild from Hitler to Gacy, Charles Manson to Marilyn Manson (with a corset), Freddie from Nightmare on Elm Street with a glove to that guy in the hockey mask, Osama Bin Laden to a Teletubbie.

You can dress him in a KKK outfit with racist drag, a NAMBLA boy love T-Shirt or a flesh eating "Silence of the Lambs" mask.



11" x 8.5"

My favourite is the Jesus Dress Up BDSM, it is ever so sexy.

Haven't you fantasized about the sex life of the saviour ?

Well, now is your chance to explore all the fetishes the Lord has to offer and after all these years surely he would know more than a few..



Nurse outfits, latex, suspenders, a blow up doll mask, a pig mask and lots more, you can even dress Jesus as a baby with a messy baby bib.

Every sort of kink is catered for her in superb style and your fridge will never, ever look the same again !

Of course he needs a new sign doesn't he ? The old INRI doesn't seem to fit bondage Jesus, so "No Pain, No Gain" is the way to go and it looks so good on top of that damn cross.

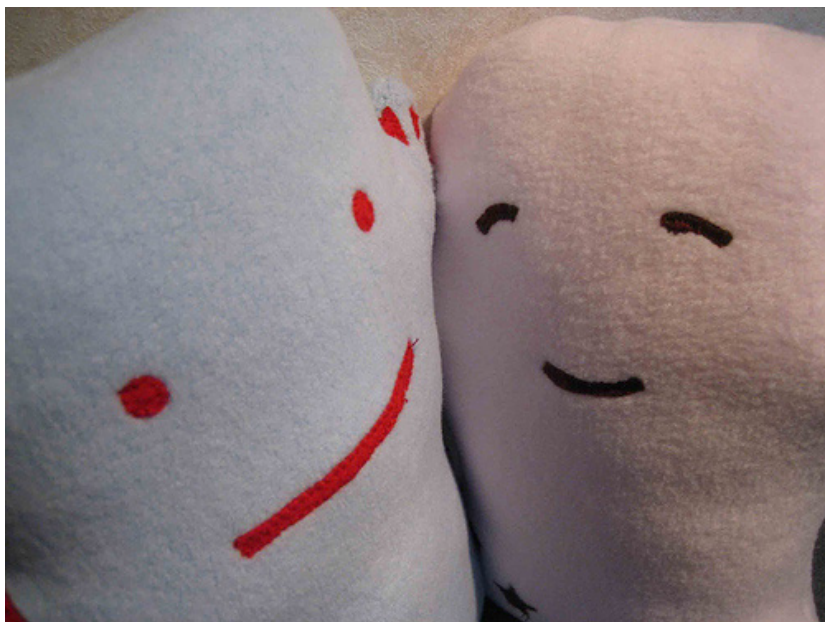


These are witty, fun, offensive, blasphemous, sexy and delightful, everything I need to make my day amusing. Each morning you can laugh to yourself as you dress Jesus for a new day.

This is a must have accessory for the modern post theistic lifestyle !

Web: <http://www.jesusedressup.com/>
Web: <http://normalbobsmith.com>

Spök-spök



Spök-spök (Ghost-Ghost)

Web: <http://spokspok.com>

Daniel Svanberg has created the Spök-spök (Swedish for ghost-ghost) plush line featuring five cute characters, three of the series have snap buttons for creative posing – which makes them very fun to play with.

They have a simple shape but it works, they just look so endearing. Spök-spök's don't need food (since they are ghosts) but they need lots of hugs and kisses !



We have a three of them here and they are strange but truly adorable.

There is Spökelina – She is a pink ghost and is always happy and smiling.

Her boyfriend is Spök-spök - The blue ghost – he is shy but very curious.

Of course Spökelina has a best friend, a toofhairy from Scotland ! There is also a very nice little mini-toofhairy !

They also have some other fun friends including Morot the carrot and Baron Von Con the blue traffic cone.

Baron Von Con is a mad plush since he came out

as a blue road cone instead of the normal orange !



I especially like the way they can be posed in all different positions and the strange and quirky mythology that has developed about them.

The Spök-spök come from Orebro where they lived in a castle, however the castle was turned into a factory which made road cones and now the Spök-spöks travel the world.

However the road cone turned out blue and the factory closed and even it has joined the Spök-spök world. When they are not travelling the Spök-spök live in a forest surrounded by flowers, pine trees and red cottages !

In the air balloons constantly circles – there is even a reindeer in the forest, but he is rarely seen as he is very shy !

For a list of retailers see:

Spok Spok Sales

<http://spokspok.com/html/buy.html>

(online sales will be available soon)

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